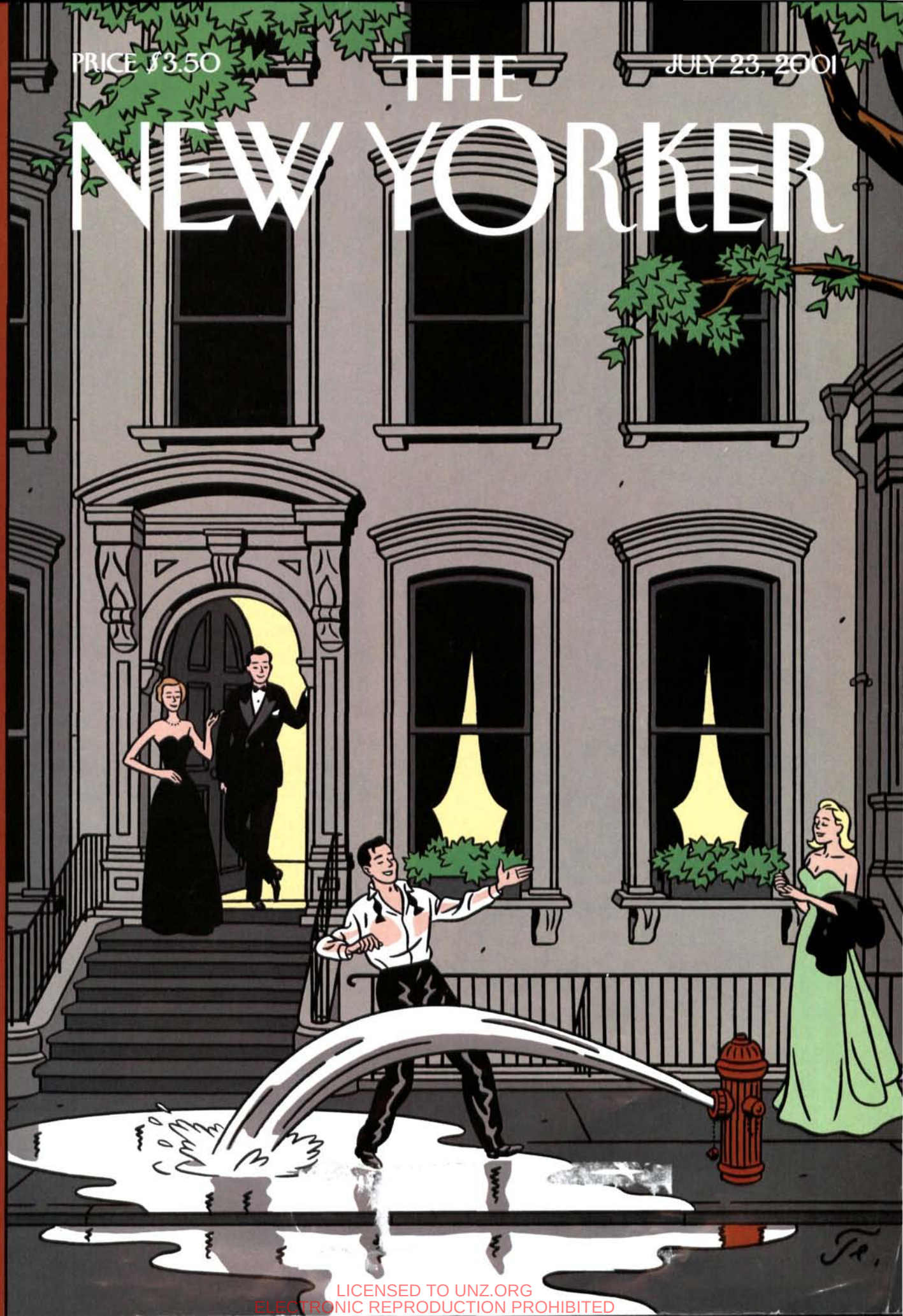
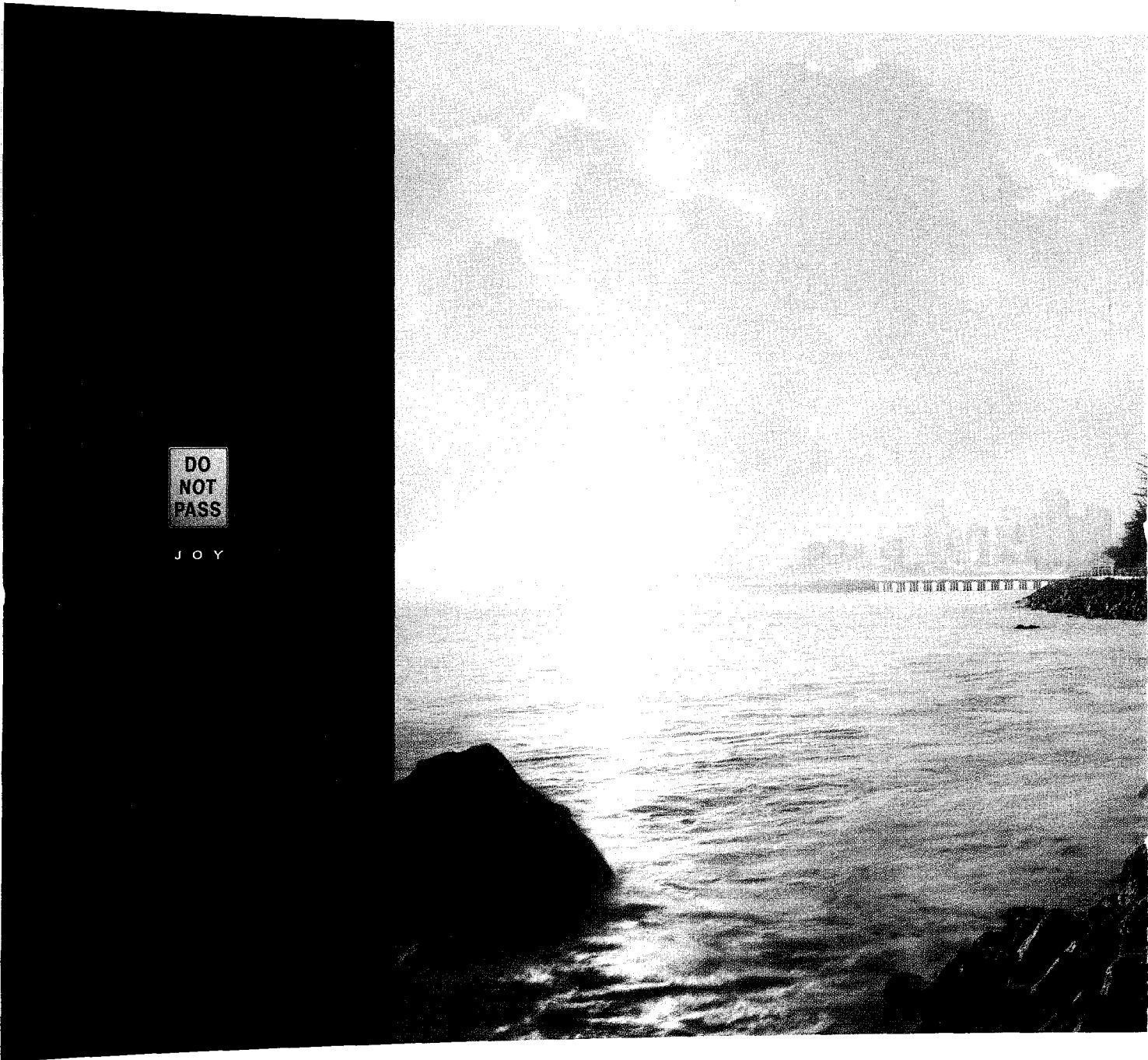


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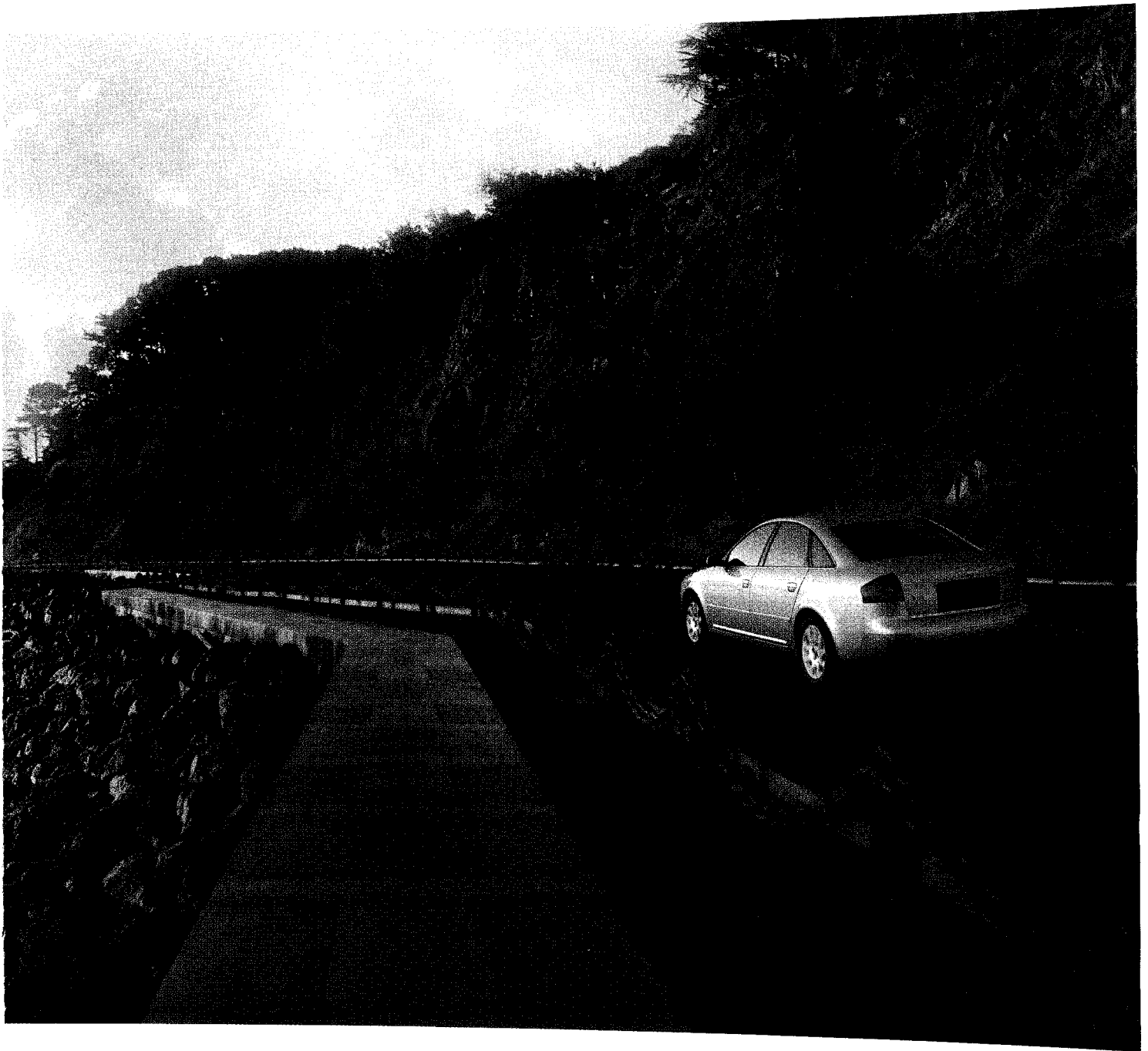


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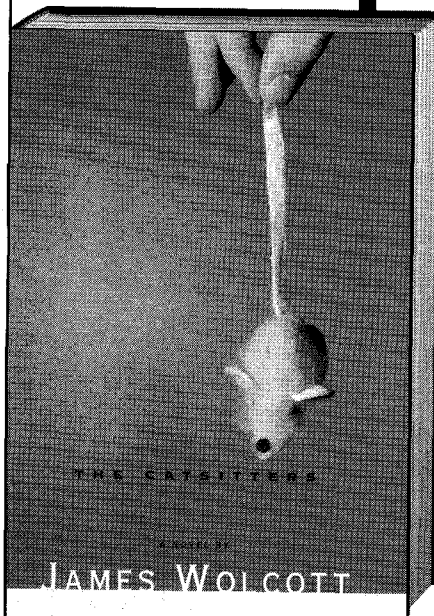
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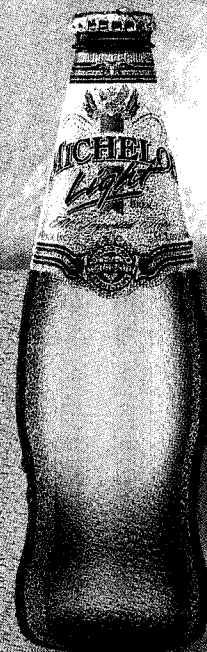
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*"When I go, I plan on taking at least two of my
goddam estate-tax lawyers with me."*

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THE MAIL

HOW TESTS FAIL

I read Nicholas Lemann's article on President Bush's proposed education reforms, which rely heavily on testing, with interest and sadness ("Testing Limits," July 2nd). I realized that I might have written the same sort of thing twenty-five years ago—before I became a teacher. What saddened me was his assurance about what achievement is. It's just not true that "good tests" will tell what children are learning. Teachers must work extremely hard to find where each child is, and to decide which of many possible approaches will best help that child learn. Schools are not factories; test scores are not products. No test, no matter how well designed, will ever reveal who a child is. It would be better to take the money being funnelled to test companies and use it to reduce class size, so that teachers can really teach.

Steve Cohen

Lecturer, Department of Education
Tufts University
Medford, Mass.

Representative George Miller almost got it right when he told Lemann that to cure our nation's educational ills we need to "equalize the funding." But the testing Miller argues for is no way to achieve this. No one in the national education debate is willing to tackle the most taboo subject in American politics: replacing the funding of schools primarily through local property taxes with a national school tax. It's unfair, unrealistic, and, indeed, cruel to expect kids who don't have basic supplies or decent classrooms to do as well on tests as kids who have laptops, soccer fields, libraries, and motivated, happy teachers. To demand that they do so is a recipe not for success but for crippling anxiety.

Glenn Berger
Ossining, N.Y.

I am a teacher in an inner-city public school in San Francisco. Here, we've already seen how one aspect of Bush's plan works: quite a number of schools have been "held accountable" for their

performance, been "given help to improve," and then been "reconstituted"—closed and re-opened under new management—with depressing results. Many of the reconstituted schools are still faltering, and many good teachers have been either driven out entirely or demoralized. And, sadly, many of the bright young teachers who were recruited to replace the supposedly unsatisfactory old ones are already gone, and have likely been lost to the profession forever. In the real world, testing is vulnerable to both profit-driven and politically motivated agendas. Lemann points out that the commercial test-publishing industry "is the one indisputable winner the bill has produced thus far." That's one result we can all count on.

Pamela R. Gill

San Francisco, Calif.

HE'S GOT GAME

Larissa MacFarquhar's portrait of Stanley Fish, with whom I play basketball, ends by noting his determination to play the game after his retirement from the University of Illinois at Chicago some years hence ("The Dean's List," June 11th). If she had tailed Fish's Jaguar to his game on the South Side, she would have learned how well sport imitates life. Fish prefers offense to defense; he shoots the highest percentage of air balls, yet makes the highest percentage of improbable hook shots of anyone in our gang; and he can move only to his left while dribbling with his right hand. But he is happily socialized to the peculiar rules of our interpretive community, to which he supplies learned and rapid-fire commentary before, after, and during the contest.

Richard A. Epstein

Professor of Law, University of Chicago
Chicago, Ill.

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "The Mail," *The New Yorker*, 4 Times Square, New York, N.Y. 10036-6592. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047 or sent via E-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



THE THEATRE OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

IF YOU EVER LEAVE ME, I'M GOING WITH YOU!

From the husband-and-wife comedy writers Renee Taylor and Joseph Bologna, a new play, about their thirty-six-year relationship. In previews. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

MR. PRESIDENT

Gerard Allesandrini has updated Irving Berlin's 1962 musical to reflect the current political scene. The show will run in repertory with Allesandrini's "Forbidden Broadway 2001: A Spoof Odyssey." In previews. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

THE SEAGULL

Mike Nichols directs John Goodman, Marcia Gay Harden, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Kevin Kline, Debra Monk, Larry Pine, Natalie Portman, Stephen Spinella, Meryl Streep, and Christopher Walken in Chekov's play, the second production in the New York Shakespeare Festival's outdoor season. Previews begin July 24. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park, near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 539-8750.)

SHUT UP AND LOVE ME

An limited-run encore engagement of the performance artist Karen Finley's latest examination of sexuality. Previews begin July 24. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 741-0391.)

SLANGUAGE

Poetry, jazz, hip-hop, politics, the blues, and boleros are all a part of the latest work by the Bronx troupe known as Universes. Jo Bonney is the director. In previews through July 22. Opens July 23 at 7. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 239-6200.)

TOPDOG/UNDERDOG

Don Cheadle and Jeffrey Wright portray a pair of rivalrous brothers, Lincoln and Booth, in Suzan-Lori Parks's new comedy. In previews. George C. Wolfe is the director. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400.)

OPENED RECENTLY

THE AMERICAN LIVING ROOM DIRECTING CABARET

The annual summer series presents two-night-only stagings of short works directed by emerging artists. The festival continues through Sept. 2. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., at Spring St. 647-0202.)

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22	23	24				

BAT BOY: THE MUSICAL

A kind of "My Fair Bat Boy," in which a half-bat, half-man—memorably played by Deven May—emerges from his childhood cave into adult bourgeois life. But the musical world he enters is one of darkness, not light, of ironies, not idealism, where plot is a history of abdications and song extolls the emptiness of all the standard credos—Christianity, family, community, love, redemption—and of the musical form itself. It's a jejune vision, but a smart, playful, and funny one nonetheless. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/9/01.) (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

BLAST!

A musical extravaganza, which evolved from the drum-and-bugle corps Star of Indiana. (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200.)

BLUE

In Charles Randolph-Wright's memory play, a trumpet player named Reuben Clark (Hill Harper) returns to his childhood in a small South Carolina town, where his family owns the only African-American funeral parlor. His beautiful, narcissistic, upwardly mobile mother, Peggy (Phylicia Rashad), rules the roost with a cunning withholding of affection and an ongoing fantasy of elegance and achievement, in which young Reuben (Chad Tucker) is idealized as "my own little Miles Davis" and Peggy is visited by the spectre of Blue Williams (the superb Michael McElroy), a jazz singer, who at first appears, and croons in a cool romantic vibrato, only to her. Unfortunately, Reuben's entire transition to manhood—his leaving home, his rejection of the trumpet, his therapy, and his final coming to terms with his mother—takes place offstage. What we are left with is a patina of literacy and boulevard lyricism but no internal life. It's basically a sitcom with song—as if Neil Simon and Lorraine Hansberry had married and produced "The Jeffersons" with a better vocabulary. (7/9/01) (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 307-4100.)

BLUE WINDOW

The always strong Marin Hinkle is the center of this production of Craig Lucas's 1984 ensemble piece. Ms. Hinkle's character has suffered a tragedy (we discover at the end) but has recovered enough to nervously throw a dinner party for a mismatched assortment of guests, played by a strong cast. The best moments come during the cocktail conversation, which is clever and funny

and highlights social awkwardness and isolation. In the end, the show gives no more than a flicker of hope that the clever and sensitive among us will find peace, but it's well played. (28th Street Theatre, 120 W. 28th St. 206-1515. Closes July 28.)

CHAUCER IN ROME

The latest play by John Guare, set in Italy during the final year of the last millennium. Nicholas Martin is the director. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes July 29.)

DOWN SOUTH

In a comedy by Doug Field, the Rattlestick Theatre takes aim at the Cuban-missile crisis. (224 Waverly Pl., at 11th St. 239-6200. Closes July 29.)

EDWARD III

A rarely performed and perhaps misattributed Shakespeare play about the beginning of the Hundred Years War. Though it's a peculiarly unbalanced script, this production, directed by the sister-and-brother team of Heather Anne McAllister and Kelly McAllister, is compelling. The directors take particular note of emotional nuances and smoothly handle the annoying battle scenes, and the solid performances create drama out of the question of what constitutes an oath. Mr. McAllister and W. Emory Rose, as the English and French kings, are particularly strong. (Bank Street Theatre, 155 Bank St., between Washington and West Sts. 971-4739. Closes July 22.)

42ND STREET

As a domineering diva who breaks her ankle before the big opening night, the wonderful Christine Ebersole steals the show in this revival of the 1980 tap musical based on the 1933 film. But it has to be said: it was probably easy to do. As the young chorine who steps in to save the day, Kate Levering doesn't have enough star power to shine above the legions of hoofers who crowd the stage, and Michael Cumpsty, as the gruff director, is sorely miscast. Still, if this sort of show is your cup of tea, the songs are wonderful and the dancing is fine—just know that the cup is not quite full. (Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.)

FOUR

A Worth Street Theatre staging of a drama by Christopher Shinn, which follows the relationships of a quartet of linked characters on a single day. Jeff Cohen is the director. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St. 206-1515.)

GEORGE GERSHWIN ALONE

A one-man portrait with music, written and performed by Hershey Felder and directed by Joel Zwick. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

HAROLD PINTER FESTIVAL

Lincoln Center's summer shindig includes stagings of the playwright's dramas by Dublin's Gate Theatre ("A Kind of Alaska," "One for the Road," "The Homecoming") and London's

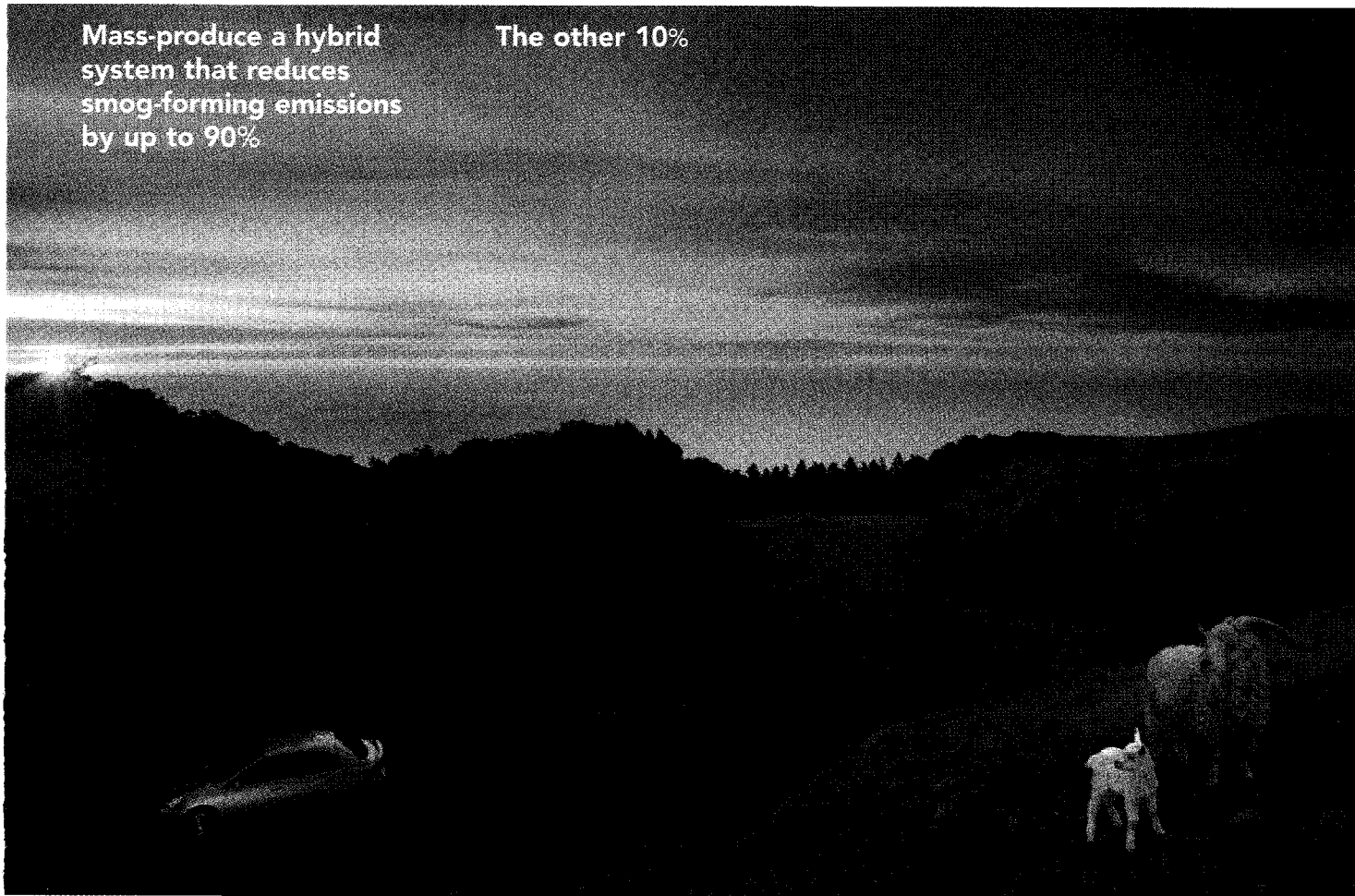
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Almeida Theatre ("Monologue"). Continues through July 29. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5928.)

I SING!

A musical comedy about postgraduate life in New York City, by Eli Bolin, Sam Forman, and Benjamin Salka. (Maverick, 307 W. 26th St. 239-6200.)

KIKI & HERB: STOP, DROP & ROLL

The drag duo otherwise known as Justin Bond and Kenny Mellman, in their latest show. (Fez, 380 Lafayette St. 533-2680.)

A LIFE

Fritz Weaver portrays an Irish civil servant nearing the end of his life, in Hugh Leonard's 1981 play. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

The first of two outdoor productions by the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival, directed by Terrence O'Brien. (Boscobel Restoration, Garrison, N.Y. For ticket information and directions, call 914-265-9575.)

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

The Aquila Theatre Company's version of Shakespeare's comedy, set in London in the sixties. (45 Bleecker Street Theatre, at 45 Bleecker St. 529-4530.)

MUSIC FROM A SPARKLING PLANET

A new comedy by Douglas Carter Beane ("As Bees in Honey Drown"). (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 239-6200.)

mances here are stunning. David Esbjornson directed. (2/19 & 26/01) (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

THE PRODUCERS

High-camp heaven from Mel Brooks, who wrote the music and the lyrics for this monster-hit version of his 1968 movie—in which two scoundrels try to bilk their investors by staging a surefire failure, entitled "Springtime for Hitler." The performing centerpiece of the show is Nathan Lane, as the flamboyant huckster Max Bialystock; his kind of high-amperage panache is in limited supply these days, and both he and the excellent Matthew Broderick, as the hapless accountant Leo Stroman, deliver the mail. Expertly staged by Susan Stroman. (5/7/01) (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

RANDOM HARVEST

A play about learning to take pleasure in one's own success. Richard Willett's script, about a gloomy playwright/fact checker who wins a Drama Desk Award, is a little too sweet but contains moments of vivid fun. In the end, Eliza Beckwith's sharp direction and two terrific performances, by Jay Alvarez as the playwright's lover and Patricia Randall as the ghost of Greer Garson, create a charming production. (HomeGrown Theatre, 2628 Broadway, at 100th St. 229-7500. Closes July 21.)

ROMEO AND JULIET

Theatreworks/USA's ninety-minute version of Shakespeare's play. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. For information about tickets, which are free, call 642-6754. Closes July 18.)

SAINT LUCY'S EYES

Ruby Dee portrays a back-room abortionist in civil-rights-era Memphis, in an encore staging of Bridgette A. Wimberly's drama. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.)

SIX GOUMBAS AND A WANNABE

A group of friends from the same Brooklyn neighborhood stage a reunion after fifteen years apart, in a comedy by Vincent Gagliormella. (Players, 115 MacDougal St. 239-6200.)

STONES IN HIS POCKETS

Marie Jones's play is set in an Irish village where a big-budget Hollywood movie is being made. Conleth Hill and Sean Campion play two extras in the movie and all thirteen other characters as well. Though the play has its clever ways when it comes to sending up both Hollywood and Irish mores, the stories told here aren't anything you haven't seen before. (4/16/01) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

A THOUSAND CLOWNS

Tom Selleck is the eccentric Murray Burns, in a revival of Herb Gardner's 1962 comedy. John Rando is the director. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

TICK, TICK . . . BOOM!

The title represents the author Jonathan Larson's fear of time running out on his musical dreams, but it also plays as a spooky reminder that time did run out on him. (He died, at thirty-five, of an aortic aneurysm, just after the dress rehearsal of "Rent," his sprawling musical.) It's set on the eve of the composer's thirtieth birthday—his Walpurgisnacht—as he is caught between the pressures to succeed and to settle. Larson's ambition was to marry rock and roll to an up-to-the-minute Broadway-musical form, and this show, which has an orchestra of four and a slick, hardworking cast of three, shows him trying to adjust his goals to economic reality. Well directed by Scott Schwartz, and with Larson's plotline deftly reworked by David Auburn, it has a fetching modesty, and shows off Larson's idiosyncrasy, energy, and promise. What remains unresolved is whether he could have built on his lyric gifts to tell a proper story. Still, as a miniature testament to the ructions of his fervent heart, "Tick, Tick . . . Boom!" has sinew and a winning sweetness. (7/9/01) (Jane Street Theatre, 113 Jane St. 239-6200.)

WHERE'S MY MONEY?

A new comedy by John Patrick Shanley, about two Brooklyn divorce lawyers. (Center Stage/NY, 48 W. 21st St. 905-0593. Closes July 21.)

WORLD OF MIRTH

A clown turns against his colleagues in a financially strapped carnival, in a drama by Murphy Guyer. (Theatre Four, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200.)



Tom Selleck and Nicolas King, in "A Thousand Clowns."

LOBBY HERO

In another era, the contrivances of Kenneth Lonergan's new play would have been called hokum. But because Lonergan is the writer and director of the moving and successful film "You Can Count on Me" and the author of the acclaimed plays "This Is Our Youth" and "The Waverly Gallery" the public is expecting him to aim high. He does, and misses. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

LOVE, JANIS

A musical play about Janis Joplin, built around her songs, writings, and interviews. Though it contains no new insight, it's a useful corrective to the drunken, drug-addicted legend, and the production is a fine one. Randal Myler directed with a sure eye for the telling detail, and the seven-member band really cooks. (Village Theatre, 158 Bleecker St. 307-4100.)

MAJOR BARBARA

Cherry Jones has the title role in a Roundabout Theatre Company production of Shaw's play. Daniel Sullivan is the director. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300.)

ONCE AROUND THE CITY

Mark Linn-Baker is the director of a new musical comedy, about Manhattan life during the booming eighties. With music by Robert Reale and book and lyrics by Willie Reale. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422.)

ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST

Dale Wasserman's severely dated adaptation of Ken Kesey's 1962 novel—a broad allegory, set in a mental hospital, about the perils of nonconformity—is a quaint relic, but as staged by Chicago's excellent Steppenwolf Theatre it's a well-acted one. Gary Sinise leads the cast, as the incorrigible psychiatric patient Randle P. McMurphy. Terry Kinney is the director. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE PLAY ABOUT THE BABY

In Edward Albee's new play, an older couple provide a harsh taste of what life has in store for a young couple with a new baby: the ravages of adulthood, the tidal wave of troubles and injuries that come with time. Brian Murray and Marian Seldes, two veterans who are rarely less than riveting, make the most of Albee's sharp, enigmatic writing; their highly stylized, virtuosic perfor-

LONG RUNS

AIDA

Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN

Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES

Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St.

254-4370.

CABARET

Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CHICAGO

Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

CONTACT

Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center.

239-6200.

DE LA GUARDA

Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St.

239-6200.

THE DINNER PARTY

Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE FANTASTICKS

Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St.,

at Bleecker St. 674-3838.

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 2001:

A SPOOF ODYSSEY

Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St.

239-6200.

FOSSE

Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

THE FULL MONTY

Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.

KISS ME, KATE

Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE LION KING

New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St.

307-4100.

LES MISÉRABLES

Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE MUSIC MAN

Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.

PERFECT CRIME

Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401.

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

PROOF

Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.

RENT

Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.

THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW

Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of

Broadway. 239-6200.

STOMP

Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St.

477-2477.

THE SYRINGA TREE

Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.

THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE

Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.

TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING

St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES

Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

LA SCALA BALLET

It's never exactly clear what's going on in La Scala's "Amarcord," or who's who (though the Fascists are easy to spot: they're the only ones doing the modern-dance moves). But the ballet, choreographed by Luciano Cannito, remains true to the elegant and bittersweet spirit of the Fellini original. The men toss the women around in slippery pas de deux that signal romantic hope or romantic struggle, then recede with their partners into the mesmerizing spinning and leaping of the corps, performed to Nino Rota's infectious carnival-of-life music. Presented in repertory with "Giselle." (New York State Theatre. 721-6500. July 18 and July 20 at 8, July 19 at 7:30, July 21 at 2 and 8, and July 22 at 3.)

PBS-TV "Live from Lincoln Center" -
Avery Fisher Hall Concert - Thursday, July 19 at 8 pm
Late Show with David Letterman - Wednesday, July 18



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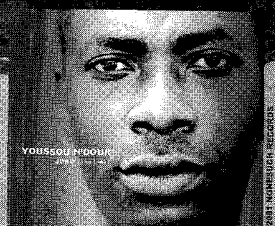
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TRISHA BROWN DANCE COMPANY

The twelve-member troupe presents "El Trilogy," created in collaboration with the jazz trumpeter Dave Douglas and his ensemble, with sets by Terry Winters. The work includes "Five Part Weather Invention," "Rapture to Leon James," and "Groove and Countermove." (LaGuardia Concert Hall, Amsterdam Ave. at 65th St. 721-6500. July 18-20 at 8 and July 21 at 2 and 8.)

PILOBOLUS

The storied company, whose directorate (Robby Barnett, Alison Chase, Jonathan Wolken, Michael Tracy) is nearly the same size as the troupe (which is always, in every incarnation, six), presents a month of performances, with three programs,

JAZZ NOTES



ÉMINENCES TERRIBLES

Many avant-garde players make a big first impression and then quietly disappear, but others are making graceful transitions into later life, generating as much heat today as they did when they initially arrived on the scene.

Some thirty-five years ago, the tenor saxophonist Archie Shepp and the trombonist Roswell Rudd headed up a series of ensembles that mixed post-Coltrane effusions, R. & B. funk, African cross rhythms, swing-era tonalities, and radical agitprop. The results were invigorating and more than a little bit scary. Their reunion last year, captured on "Live in New York" (Verve), is a familiar, yet never comfortable, affair. If the rhythms are more polite, the themes more straightforward and bluesy, and the solos far more economical than in years past, the dogged individuality of both players' tones, not to mention their improvisational plays, marks them as delightfully unrepentant eccentrics.

For much of the eighties, Marilyn Crispell was the pianist of choice for Anthony Braxton, the prolific saxophonist, flutist, and bandleader. At once meditative and corrosive in her playing, Crispell shines on "Amaryllis" (ECM), a beautiful recording co-led by the bassist Gary Peacock and the drummer Paul Motian, two older players who flourished during the peak years of free jazz. Although there is little in the way of overt melody or conventional jazz rhythms, the trio still manages to swing.

Motian also leads his own ensembles, including one named, fittingly, the Electric Bebop Band. "Europe" (Winter & Winter) contains bebop compositions alongside modernist originals, all executed in an unfashionable plugged-in manner. With two electric guitars, an electric bass, and two saxophones, the band is a muscular ensemble that retains a certain agility, thanks to Motian's effervescent drumming. Motian loves to tweak the sacred cows of bebop with outré, skewed arrangements: turning conventions on their heads is still as crucial to him as a heartbeat.

—Steve Futterman

each of which offers a new work. The three premières are "Davenen," which considers prayer in various highly active forms, set to a score by the Klezmatiks; "Monkey and the White Bone Demon," based on a sixteenth-century Buddhist novel; and the obliquely erotic duet "Symbiosis." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. July 16-20 at 8 and July 21 at 2 and 8.)

DANCES FOR WAVE HILL

Wave Hill's alfresco dance series offers site-specific works, created for the twenty-eight-acre garden, by Zvi Gotheiner & Dancers, Monica Bill Barnes, and Potri Ranka Manis and her troupe, Kinding Sindaw. (Wave Hill, 675 W. 252nd St., the Bronx. 718-549-3200. July 18 and July 25 at 6:30 and July 22 at 5.)

BALLET TECH

Elliot Feld's company performs contemporary ballet. (Battery Park City. No tickets necessary. July 24 at 7.)

"PERMANENT FOR NOW"

The four works choreographed by D. Chase Angier for her company include "Con Queso," set to the music of Herb Alpert, and "Red Delicious," in which an older Snow White sees younger versions of herself in the mirror. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 334-7479. July 19-21 at 8.)

"RIVERDANCE—ON BROADWAY"

Not the Lord of the Dance with his shirt off and the leather truss. The other one. (Gershwin Theatre, 222 W. 51st St. 307-4100. July 18 and July 21 at 2 and 8, July 19-20 and July 24 at 8, and July 22 at 3. Through Aug. 26.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE FESTIVAL

July 17-20 at 8, July 21 at 2 and 8, and July 22 at 2: It has been more than ten years since the French hip-hoppers Compagnie Käfig were first invited onto the stage of that nation's venerated dance palaces. But until this year this sweet troupe, from the largely immigrant outskirts of Lyon, couldn't seem to get over how weird it was to be joint-popping, head-spinning, arm-noodling, and rapping through a surgical tube (like a singing banana slug) for the culture-house crowd. Käfig means "cage" in Arabic, and the company's first evening-length work, in 1996, featured a ballerina in a cage and hip-hoppers outside. In its second work, "Recital," the guys performed their break dances armed with violins. But with "DixVersions" (a French pun) Compagnie Käfig has relaxed. "DixVersions" is simple choreography," says the artistic director, Mourad Merzouki, "in primary colors." ♦ July 19-20 at 8:15, July 21 at 2:15 and 8:15, and July 22 at 5: Jane Comfort and Company in "Asphalt." (Becket, Mass. For information about tickets, call 413-243-0745.)

NIGHT LIFE CONCERTS

LUCY KAPLANSKY / JEB LOY NICHOLS

Kaplansky, a self-proclaimed folk hybrid of Tammy Wynette and Elaine from "Seinfeld," stops by with songs from "Ten Year Night," her most recent studio recording and the first since she dropped her New York City-based private psychology practice to sing full time. A truly gifted performer, Kaplansky burns through a bubbly, modest stage persona with strong flat picking and a bag full of enchanting songs. / The tragically earnest singer Nichols is a native Midwesterner who lives in London. Although he's interested in reggae and recorded part of his latest solo record, "Just What Time It Is," in Jamaica, Nichols plays music more evocative of James Taylor than of Bob Marley. (World Trade Center Plaza. No tickets necessary. July 18 at 6.)

SEAPORT MUSIC BOAT

The downtown stalwart David Johansen has recently been exploring yet another career path—his latest band is called the Harry Smiths and is devoted to the seminal folk recorded by the seminal musicologist of the same name. But he hasn't abandoned his loudmouthed, brassy alter ego Buster Poindexter just yet, and you can catch Buster on an evening cruise. (Pier 16. 630-8888. July 18 at 7 and 9:30.)

"JAZZ IN JULY"

The annual uptown improvisational get-together continues. July 18: An evening of jazz duets, as plenty of varied instrumentalists—including the pianists Bill Mays and Dick Hyman, the guitarists Howard Alden and Bucky Pizzarelli, the trombonist Wycliffe Gordon, and the reeds players Ken Peplowski and Scott Robinson—pair off together. ♦ July 19: Jazz music and cartoons were bosom buddies all during the golden age of nineteenth-thirties and forties animation. From background

scores to onscreen appearances by animated versions of such icons as Louis Armstrong and Cab Calloway, jazz held pride of place in the wonderful shorts that became part of the national imagination. Celebrating this marriage are Hyman and a host of players, including the trumpeter Jon Gordon, the pianist Bill Charlap, and the bassist Frank Tate. ♦ July 24: Count on Hyman to bring it all back home again in style when the encyclopedic pianist leads a program celebrating the nascent jazz of New Orleans and its first chief composer, Jelly Roll Morton. The trumpeter Randy Sandke and the guitarist Alden, among others, share in the fun. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. All shows at 8.)

MIDSUMMER NIGHT SWING

Dancing under the stars at Lincoln Center. July 18: A night of regional American music with Johnny Sansone, an accordionist and harmonica player from New Orleans. Sansone, who's also known as Jumpin' Johnny, has a backing band that includes two veterans of the Uptown Horns, the saxophonist Crispin Cioe and the trumpeter Larry Etkin. Sharing the bill is the wild-man guitarist Bill Kirchen, one of the founders of the Lost Planet Airmen, and his band Too Much Fun. ♦ July 19: New York's own George Gee and His Make-Believe Ballroom Orchestra enjoy the company of the silver-throated vocalist Ann Hampton Callaway and Claude (Fiddler) Williams, a blues-drenched violinist whose career dates back to Kansas City's golden age, in the thirties. This is a benefit night during which pastry chefs from notable area restaurants offer dessert. ♦ July 20: The Haitian multi-instrumentalist Richard Augustin pays tribute to his compatriot composer and bandleader Coupé Cloué, with help from the sultry Haitian singer Emeline Michel. ♦ July 21: The Brazilian saxophonist Paulo Moura, with assistance from the American jazz pianist Cliff Korman, treats the crowd to a night of *samba de gafieira*, or Brazilian dance-hall music. ♦ July 24: A night of Irish dancing with Danú, an energetic set of twenty-somethings from Waterford. With the Cape Breton fiddler, banjo player, and guitarist J. P. Cormier and the remarkable accordionist James Keane. (Fountain Plaza. 875-5766. Dancing starts at 8; lessons are offered at 6:30.)

RAMMSTEIN

Despite staunchly denying that they take their name from the site of a 1988 airplane catastrophe, this German ensemble's mechanized racket does indeed conjure up images of tangled, burning metal. Fusing the crunching guitar assault of Metallica with the cold, electronic pulse of Kraftwerk, Rammstein's ridiculously po-faced façade has plenty of irony beneath it—hence their use of oozing codpieces and abundant pyrotechnics onstage. (Hammerstein Ballroom. July 18 at 8.)

CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!

The alfresco concerts in Prospect Park continue. July 19: The Alloy Orchestra performs the score to Fritz Lang's 1927 film "Metropolis," which will be screened simultaneously. ♦ July 21: Kid Koala is a wildly grinning, madcap Canadian turntablist whose inventiveness surpasses that of anyone who ever went to the trouble of packing records in a crate in order to scratch them up in public. When he tours with his backup band, the funk-heavy Bullfrog, he performs the parts ordinarily taken by horns, keyboards, and vocalists, as well as extraordinary parts that exist only in Koala's brain. He is a genius. With Vancouver's Kinnie Starr, an edgy yet enchanting chanteuse with a thing for slow, trippy beats. (Prospect Park Bandshell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. 718-855-7882, ext. 45. All shows at 7:30.)

LINCOLN CENTER FESTIVAL

The Africa Out Loud series wraps up with a concert by the outstanding Senegalese vocalist Yousou N'Dour. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. July 19 at 8.)

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE

New York's premier outdoor concert series continues. July 20 at 7: The String Cheese Incident formed in Boulder, Colorado, some nine years ago, and ever since they've taken their self-described "sacreligious mix of bluegrass, calypso, salsa, Afro-



Students at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, who perform free concerts on summer weekends on the Inside/Out stage (see Dance).

pop, funk, rock, and jazz" straight to the people. A benefit concert. ♦ July 21 at 3: The blues guitarist Susan Tedeschi and the stunning pedal steel guitarist Robert Randolph. ♦ July 22 at 3: The British two-step sensation Craig David. (Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. 360-2777.)

STEVIE NICKS

After periodic reunions with the emotionally complicated supergroup Fleetwood Mac, the beloved seventies icon resumes her solo career, touring behind "Trouble in Shangri-La," one of her most consistently enjoyable records. (Jones Beach Theatre. 516-221-1000. July 20 at 8.)

R. KELLY

In an attempt to maintain both street cred with the hip-hop crowd and favor with the ladies, Kelly alternates personas between that of a libidinous, ghetto-fabulous player and that of a sensitive R. & B. balladeer. But it doesn't matter if he's bragging about his bedroom prowess or earnestly professing his adoration—either way the results are never short of cloying. (Theatre at Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. July 21 at 8.)

ROXY MUSIC

Given the weary air of dinner-jacket sophistication they exuded prior to breaking up, in 1983, one would have thought the notion of a reunion tour to be beneath the urbane concerns of the gentlemen of Roxy Music. Regardless, Bryan Ferry has reconvened the influential British band (albeit without founding member and foppish foil Bryan Eno) for a nostalgic global jaunt. Expect all the old favorites. (Theatre at Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. July 23-24 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—July 20: The David Grisman quintet. After more than a quarter of a century of tirelessly promoting acoustic music,

raising the level of mandolin virtuosity, and leading some of the most sophisticated and inventive eclectic-music ensembles around, Grisman can safely be called a national treasure.

BOTTOM LINE

15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—July 18: The bluegrass music of Nickel Creek. July 20: Doc Watson. The majority of folk revivalists perform as if they had formaldehyde coursing through their veins, but the seventy-eight-year-old blind guitarist Watson is a grand old man whose wit, vigor, and virtuosity should be the envy of many a younger man.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—July 18: With his band of grunge heavyweights on seemingly endless hiatus, Jerry Cantrell, the flaxen-maned Alice in Chains guitarist, continues to pursue a solo career. July 21: Seattle's sorely undersung power-pop group the Posies.

KNITTING FACTORY

74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—July 19: Displaying a disarmingly loquacious lyrical style that almost renders his ethnicity moot, the eccentric white Jewish rapper MC Paul Barman refreshingly ignores the conventional hip-hop mores of aggressive machismo in favor of hilariously self-deprecating yarns touched by absurdist imagery. With the revered hip-hop producer Prince Paul augmenting his credibility, Barman could very well become the anti-Eminem.

MAXWELL'S

1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—July 20: Jon Spencer Blues Explosion. Cramming its man-size wallop into the comparatively intimate confines of this indie-rock Mecca, the Lower East Side's favorite power trio brings its unique brand of frantic rock demolition to Hoboken to once again breathlessly testify to the power of the blues. July 21: Laura Cantrell, the well-connected Nashville native who, in addition to being a singer-songwriter, is the host of WFMU's "Radio Thrift Shop."

VILLAGE UNDERGROUND

130 W. 3rd St. (777-7745)—July 21: The sixties soul singer Howard Tate.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—July 19-21: For many jazz-vocal connoisseurs, Mark Murphy is the man. A paragon of the art of vocal improvisation since the fifties, Murphy is still willing and able to transform both standards and obscurities into his personal property. Dining.

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through July 22: The husband-and-wife team of the percussionist Airtio Moreira and the vocalist Flora Purim have yet to receive sufficient credit for being important pioneers in disseminating Brazilian music during the early nineteen-seventies, decades before the recent Latin-music explosion took hold. Their highly influential bossa-nova/jazz-fusion stew can still be heard whenever contemporary players look to tropical climes for inspiration.

JOE'S PUB

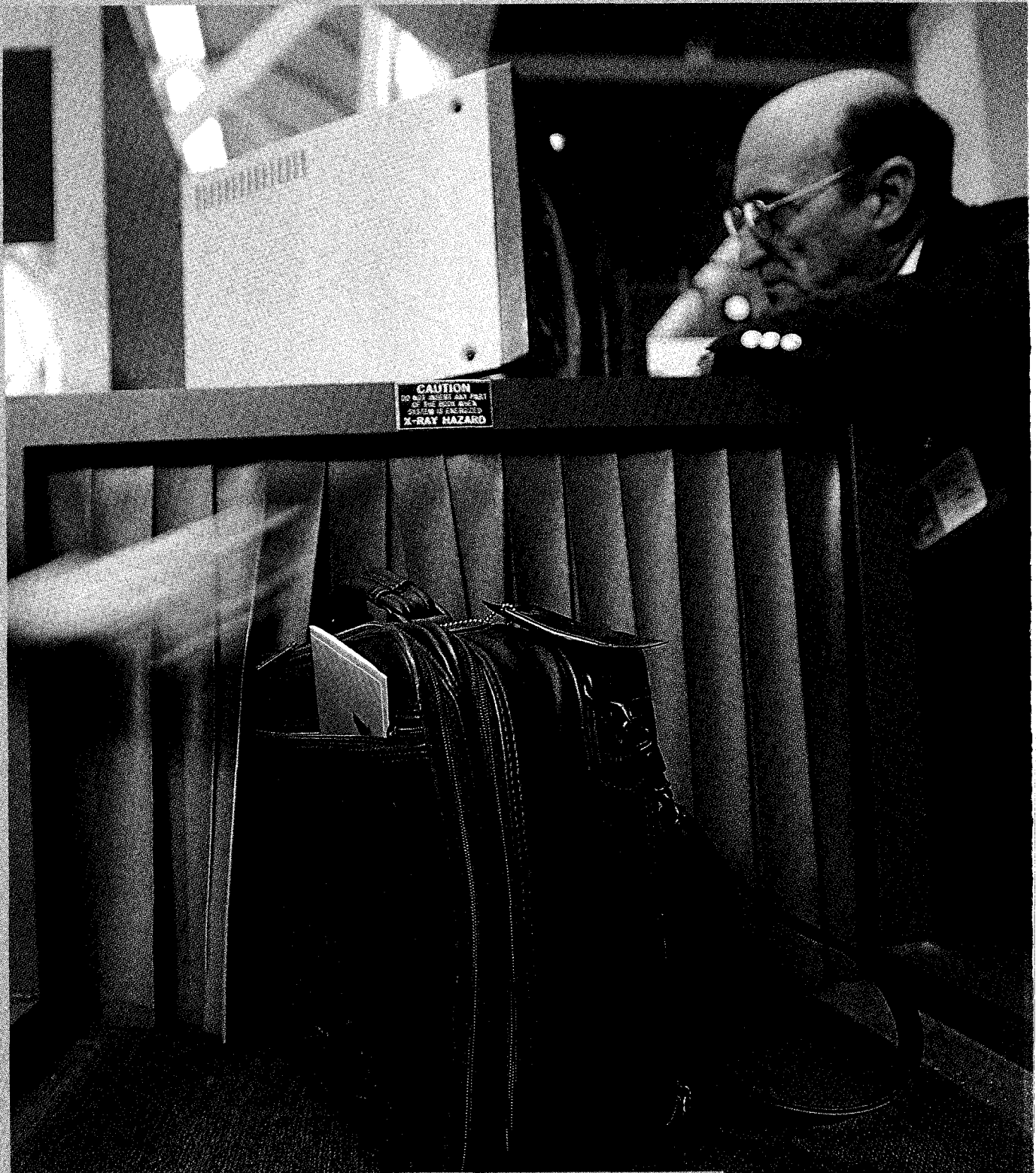
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—July 22: The Howard Fishman quartet. Led by the guitarist and singer Fishman, a Connecticut native who spent his musically formative years in New Orleans, this quartet—featuring the violinist Russell Farhang—spins out an eclectic mix of small-group swing, early American folk, and cunning originals.

UP OVER JAZZ CAFE

351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—July 19: The tenor saxophonist Sam Newsome is here with his band Global Unity on Thursdays this month.

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through July 22: The Fred Hersch trio. With his exquisite touch, sensitivity to texture, and poetic imagination, Hersch has become one of the great romantics of jazz piano. He's also cultivated an expansive repertoire that embraces composers from Richard Rodgers and Alex North to Billy Strayhorn and Ornette Coleman while including his adroit originals. In Hersch's hands such eclecticism is as natural, and as life affirming, as breathing. The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra holds sway on Mondays.



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ART MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—“**Summer Selections: American Landscape Drawings and Watercolors.**” Nearly fifty summer landscapes and seascapes—all works on paper by American artists—are tucked away in the cozy mezzanine galleries of the American Wing. Maurice Prendergast conveys the simple pleasures of a seaside stroll in a jaunty watercolor of nineteenth-century day-trippers. On a darker note, Thomas Cole’s fastidious drawing “The Wounded Indian Slaking His Death-Thirst” pits the eternity of nature against the fragility of life, as massive boulders and contorted trees dwarf the tiny stooping figure. Frequent visitors to the museum will get a kick out of Frederick Arthur Bridgman’s studies of the Temple of Dendur, portrayed against a view of Egypt as opposed to the familiar one of Central Park. Through Sept. 2. ♦ “**Dancing on the Roof: Photography and the Bauhaus (1923-29)**” focusses on the work of László Moholy-Nagy and his students at the Weimar haven for artistic experiment. Through Aug. 26. ♦ **Sculptures** by Joel Shapiro, on the roof. Through late fall. ♦ With a consort of starstruck press and film clips and more than eighty original outfits, “**Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House Years**” reminds viewers of the almost brash propriety of the “Jackie look.” Through July 29. ♦ “**Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890-1930.**” Through Sept. 9. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—An antidote to Gehry fever, the first half of the Mies van der Rohe extravaganza has opened with “**Mies in Berlin.**” Matching its subject’s famous simplicity, the show is a calmly paced bildungsroman, tracing a thirty-year progression from Schinkel-esque prodigy to modernist master. Understandably, the show’s curators, Terence Riley and Barry Bergdoll, worried that canonical projects like the Tugendhat House and the Barcelona Pavilion might seem too familiar. Their decision to freshen things up with Thomas Ruff’s cloying colorized photographs is the show’s only lapse. Otherwise, it’s easy to fall under the spell of Mies’s planar vision, his integration of landscape and garden design (more suited to a Californian than a Germanic climate), and his infectious love of *betonte Leere*, or heightened emptiness. A complementary show (at the Whitney) picks up where this one leaves off, with Mies’s arrival in the United States in 1938. Through Sept. 11. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—At Frank Gehry’s first retrospective, at the Whitney, in 1986, undulant titanium roofs and wriggling walls were nowhere in sight. The Los Angeles-based architect seemed a quirky regional figure, fond of unorthodox materials (cardboard, chain-link fencing) and given to chopping projects into multiple room-size buildings. Nobody could have predicted that he would soon be the world’s most sought-after and publicized architect. This new, profoundly exhilarating show tracks Gehry’s path to Bilbao, and offers working models of current projects in Scotland, Germany, Cleveland, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. It’s too much to absorb in a single visit, but even a quick walk-through will leave visitors delighted, buoyed, amazed—and a little nostalgic for the plumb-line architecture that Gehry’s fluid, crumpling planes seem poised to supplant. Through Aug. 26. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—For his first New York retrospective, Wayne Thiebaud’s career has been served up in four courses, beginning with dessert. During his pastry period, Thiebaud turned cafeteria fare—not just wedges of cake and pie but a whole alphabet of prepared foods—into some-

thing enduringly wry and lovely, a celebration of everyday artifice. The stiff and studied portraits that follow are the show’s weakest moment, but Thiebaud returns to form in the subsequent cityscapes and farmland scenes, creating steep, unapologetic Arcadias. There are echoes of Hopper, Diebenkorn, and Johns throughout, but none of Thiebaud’s predecessors have his cool, confectionary jauntiness. Through Sept. 23. ♦ “**Mies in America,**” the larger of the companion exhibitions on the onetime Bauhaus director, shows how the architect’s work evolved after his arrival here in



BACK ON THE MAP *In the late sixties, the Philadelphia-based Howard Tate was one of soul music's brightest lights: his gritty, funky hits, most created in collaboration with producer Jerry Ragovoy, were covered by Janis Joplin ("Get It While You Can") and others. But Tate's career faltered, and after the death of one of his daughters in a house fire in 1976 he took up selling insurance to support his family. In the mid-nineties Tate became a preacher, and more recently he has returned to soul music, recording at Ragovoy's home studio in Alpharetta, Georgia. Onstage at the Village Underground this week, Tate will try to prove that, while time waits for no man, it may slow down for a select few.*

1938, from European avant-gardism to an increasingly space-age take on American practicality. Through Sept. 23. ♦ The Tower of Babel has nothing on the Whitney this month, as Joseph Grigely transforms the lobby gallery into a chapel of white noise. The artist became deaf at the age of ten, and conducts conversations with nonsigners through notes scribbled by them on scraps of paper. Grigely can speak, so we read only one side of the dialogue,

ranging from a series of chitchat non sequiturs (“loud wind now” followed by “Wim Wenders, too”) or emphatic declarations (“I want 10%”). More than twenty-five hundred of these scraps are installed floor to ceiling in the oval space, the visual equivalent of a drone. Through Sept. 9. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—The Discovery Room, a hands-on educational program conceived in the museum’s dark belly, has just moved into its new and permanent headquarters, a sunny, two-thousand-square-foot play space next door to the familiar big ceremonial canoe at the Seventy-seventh Street entrance. Inside the room, a replica of an African baobab tree spreads its branches over displays about the scientists and artists who studied and re-created it, and a working dinosaur dig busies young paleontologists. There’s a surprisingly wide variety of specimens for little paws to hold and shake and investigate, including an outsized dinosaur-toe bone, a mastodon tusk, and, resting in a shredded paper nest, in drawer 52 of a brand-new child-sized specimen cabinet, one emu egg, now broken. The management describes the accident as a learning experience. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART

Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—Leon Golub, the dour dean of political painters, is the subject of a new retrospective, covering almost fifty years of art work. Through Aug. 19. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

TRENT DOYLE HANCOCK

This young artist from Paris, Texas, makes an impressive solo debut in paintings and works on paper that scrounge from Johns’s letters, Rauschenberg’s assemblages, and Guston’s fleshy mounds while staking out a messy territory all their own. Hancock’s palette tends toward black-and-white and Pepto-Bismol pink, though one canvas is a Skittle-colored riot. Like the narrative guide that accompanies the show, in which characters like Torpedo Boy and The Legend duke it out with vegans, the paintings pulse with fierce imagination. Through July 28. (James Cohan, 41 W. 57th St. 755-7171.)

Short List

ALEXANDER LIBERMAN

Ameringer Howard, 41 E. 57th St. 935-1110. Through Aug. 10.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

JACQUELINE BOOTIER

Titled “Basic Training,” Bootier’s debut show features smeary palette-knife images based on family snapshots: spackle waifs sitting on the potty or lurching toward big parental feet. Though the press materials and some critics have hailed the “expressionist potential” here, Bootier’s deliberate garishness and her choice of cutesy motifs telegraph more irony than angst. On the other hand, maybe Bootier is right in thinking that the only way to access the inchoate griefs of toddlerhood is with a technique borrowed from Leroy Neiman. Through July 27. (Lombard Fried, 531 W. 26th St. 967-8040.)

JASON DUVAL

Duval’s blunt brushstrokes glide and lurch around these small canvases like the viscous equivalent of Magic Marker, creating an old-fashioned kind of modernist confusion. Where’s the foreground?

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

TABLES FOR TWO



BOUTERIN

420 E. 59th St. (758-0323)—East Fifty-ninth Street near the Queensboro Bridge entrance is a dismal stretch, as loud and dusty as a construction site. But next to an underground parking garage, past an Astro-Turfed patio, is an unlikely refuge—a taste of Provence (with a dash of New Hope, Pennsylvania).

The chef, Antoine Bouterin, who left Le Périgord six years ago, has said that his restaurant was inspired by his grandmother Marguerite, a well-known Provençal restaurateur, but the sort of person the place really brings to mind is a batty great-aunt. Past the entranceway, overflowing with the scent of hothouse flowers and candle wax, the space is cluttered with French antiques and flea-market finds: doll houses, cuckoo clocks, Bundt-cake molds, garden trolls, golden putti, medicine bottles, country scenes, and old framed barkeep taunts ("If you're so damn smart, why ain't you rich?"). Looking around the dimly lit, ochre-walled dining room while trying to make up your mind about which wine to choose from the terrific list, you might find a bust of Ben Franklin or a stuffed Frosty the Snowman doll. What these two gentlemen have to do with Provence perhaps only Peter Mayle could say, but there they are. It's kitsch in the grand Upper East Side tradition, an over-the-top antidote to all those slick minimalist establishments that photograph so well.

The menu steers you gently toward Bouterin's best and most traditional dishes: his sturdy homemade pâté, with cornichons and a celery-root remoulade; the crispy onion tart with anchovies; or the "very tasty and silky fish soup like Marseille fisherman." For the main course, Bouterin makes a mean bouillabaisse, with whatever fruits the sea has made available that day, and a lamb stew ("*l'agneau de sept heures façon baroque*") that's so thoroughly stewed the chef encourages diners to eat it with a spoon. The desserts are lovely, especially the *île flottante*, an island of custard floating in a pool of vanilla sauce, strewn with berries—"my aunt Marie's way." Order that, and the waiter says "Yeah!" as though you've just passed a pop quiz. (Open daily for dinner. Entrées \$20-\$29.)

—Nick Paumgarten

What's intersecting what? Sometimes, Duval's shape patterns suggest a washerful of bras and T-shirts. There are plenty of precedents for this kind of fluid abstraction, from Dove to Jensen and Nozkowski, but Duval manages to make a middle-aged idiom look surprisingly fresh. Through July 28. (Marvelli, 526 W. 26th St. 627-3363.)

NEIL FARBER

Something weird is going on in Winnipeg, where Farber, Marcel Dzama, John Plychuk, and a few like-minded friends and relatives founded a studio called the Royal Art Lodge. The Lodgers' work shares a cartoony, narrative bent; at times, it's almost indistinguishable—Farber's balloon-head infants and animals look strikingly like those of his nephew, Dzama (who is a year older). For an art world fascinated by cohorts, this back story threatens to overwhelm the pictures themselves, which are displayed here in an emphatically unpretentious crowd. The best of them are deft, glum line drawings, accompanied by captions like "Welcome to Hell, Population 1." Through July 27. (Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 243-5937.)

SUSAN HILLER

"Psi Girls" is a five-part film projection using clips from Hollywood films about teen-age girls with psychic powers ("Carrie" is notably absent). Hiller's work has long explored the uncanny in relation to

the subconscious mind—the Freud museum once commissioned a print—and this installation, with its parti-colored format and percussive soundtrack, has an undeniable hypnotic strength. Unfortunately, to a New York audience up to its eyeballs in girl power (cf. Justine Kurland and Katy Grannan), the installation feels like a paranormal pep rally. Through July 27. (Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 741-1111.)

THOMAS PIHL

Is it the pale translucence or the soft drips at the edges that make Pihl's paintings look like so many elegantly iced sheet cakes? In fact, they are canvas and board, covered with poured layers of tinted acrylic medium, so that colors, like the pink aura around the edge of one piece, glow through from behind. The tiny bubbles that occasionally appear do nothing to temper the sense that Pihl is striving for perfection; there is an intriguing battle here between the inoffensiveness of his craftsmanship—which would do a baker proud, and go well with any decorative scheme—and the narcotic sway of perfectionism. Through July 27. (Erben, 516 W. 20th St. 645-8701.)

MIES VAN DER ROHE / LOUIS KAHN

To accompany the Mies and Gehry triple bill playing at uptown museums, Protetch has put together a spectacular collection of architectural drawings by two of the greatest practitioners of the last century. As you might expect, Mies's drawings are forcefully spare: a few orthogonals ornamented by quick scribbles to indicate mass. Kahn's aren't exactly fussy either, but it's clear that he took more pleasure in drawing for its own sake. Even in charcoal on tracing paper, his plans and elevations look eerily observed—though many of the projects documented here were never built. Through July 31. (511 W. 22nd St. 633-6999.)

"ALTERED LANDSCAPE"

The most literally altered landscapes here, those whose changes are easiest to understand, may be Youngsuk Suh's snapshot of tourists slogging through "Petrified Forest National Park" and Christoph Draeger's "Catastrophe #1," a color photo of a staged tornado-torn scene, strewn with Matchbox cars and miniature debris. Of those works that take the show's title figuratively, the coup is Oliver Irwin's "Peas Growing in Car Wash Brooms," in which water squirts through plastic push brooms to nourish young pea plants lodged in their bristles. If Damien Hirst's "The Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living" broke open the gamey still-life with an audible gasp, this cracks the botanical genre with the power of the chuckle. Through July 27. (Lawrence Feuer LaMontagne, 531 W. 26th St. 631-7700.)

"(SELF) PORTRAITS"

This collection of portraits and self-portraits is worth seeing just for a baker's dozen of Mona Hatoum's Polaroid "Static Portraits," in the back room. Her sober subjects all seem to be touching, just out of the frame, one of those electrified glass balls; their tresses, ranging from short to luxuriously long, stand on end, creating an amusing contrast to their unsmiling faces. Matthew Benedict's large oil illustration of "The House of the Seven Gables," and work by Willie Cole, Eugenio Dittborn, Paul Thek, and others, are interesting only as biographical footnotes. Through July 27. (Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 367-7474.)

Short List

PETER PINCHBECK

Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 463-7770. Through Aug. 10.

GALLERIES-DOWNTOWN

TEUN HOCKS

Painted photography is a notoriously drecky genre, but this Dutch artist handles it with a rare, sweet-tempered aplomb. All of his pictures feature a neatly dressed figure—Hocks himself—in a mildly surreal predicament. He's a logger, cutting down a forest with an oar; a birder, leaning forlornly against a tree;

a sleeper whose bed straddles a path that winds through fairy-tale hills. It's easy to see echoes of Magritte and Rockwell here, but the connection isn't dishonorable: Hocks shares their weird knack for tweaking banality till it glimmers. Through Aug. 10. (P.P.O.W., 476 Broome St. 941-8642.)

"WET"

This exhibition of works by more than thirty artists is as crowded and lively as a public pool in July, and it overflows the small gallery, offering almost every possible take on the title. Puddles, tears, and toilets; drinking, drowning, and snorkeling; it's all here, in every imaginable contemporary idiom. Naturally, some lewdness is de rigueur: the show's high point is an ejaculatory sculpture by Peter Boynton, a sort of abstract equivalent to Takashi Murakami's "Lonesome Cowboy." The finest piece, however, is its anticlimax, Katherine Bradford's painting of a naked middle-aged man—his doormat of chest hair is comic perfection—floating in the cerulean shallows of a swimming pool, looking spent. Through July 27. (Ross, 569 Broadway. 343-2161.)

Short List

AIDAS BAREIKIS

Koenig, 359 Broadway. 334-9255. Through July 28.

AUCTIONS & ANTIQUES

CHRISTIE'S

July 19 at 10 A.M. and 2: Entertainment memorabilia, including a selection of items that belonged to Bette Davis. The Oscar given to Davis for her leading role in the 1938 film "Jezebel" is the highlight of the sale; among the other lots are scripts from such films as "Gaslight" and "The Philadelphia Story," technical drawings made for "Star Wars," and a Fender Squire Stratocaster guitar signed by Paul McCartney. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

FRANÇOIS-XAVIER SEREN

As a photographer for the French society magazine *Point de Vue et Images du Monde*, Seren glories in his proximity to his aristocratic subjects and their eccentricities. The Marquis d'Amat, holding a pet rabbit, observes the viewer through tinted glasses over a chessboard at Versailles; the Duc d'Orléans wiggles his extraordinarily bushy eyebrows; and the Comtesse de Paris sits regally in a high-necked dress. The prints—particularly the candids, which sometimes look like a corporate photographer's convention shots—don't pretend to be more than the quick work of a journalist, but the subjects, and some lively compositions, bear scrutiny. Through July 21. (M.Y. Art Prospects, 135 W. 29th St. 268-7132.)

KATHERINE TURCZAN

After both of her parents were diagnosed with late-stage Alzheimer's, in the early nineteen-nineties, Katherine Turczan travelled to their homeland, Ukraine, where she photographed the children who represent the country's future, set against the landscapes of its troubled past. The subjects of her formal, tightly focussed portraits seem willing and able to carry the familial and national symbolism with which she invests them. Children endangered by radiation from Chernobyl, photographed at health-care camps in Bruhovich and Lvov, stare into the camera with penetrating eyes, their directness a counterpoint to the stoically averted glances of nuns cloaked in heavy, traditional habits. Through July 20. (Gallery 24, at 552 W. 24th St. 414-0370.)

"FIFTIES PHYSIQUE"

In the days before steroids, intellectual-property lawyers, and model-release forms, photo-studio scouts trawled bodybuilding competitions, looking for the perfect pinup. This fleshfest, which opened the day before the Gay Pride March, presents a

procession of those beefcakes: ninety vintage musclemen. Although there are plenty of full-frontal nudes of veiny and greased-up bodies, there is nothing pornographic here. A few well-composed, sensitively shot, and touching portraits even sneak in, like one of Raul Pacheco, whose faint acne scars and searching gaze give him a glimmer of realness amid all the gloss. Through Aug. 24. (Wessel & O'Connor, 242 W. 26th St. 242-8811. Open Mondays through Fridays, 11 to 6.)

"TURISMO"

For the most recent Havana Biennial, last November, the Argentine artists Leandro Erlich and Judi Werthein brought snow to Cuba—or rather, a more portable equivalent, powdered Styrofoam. They also brought skis, a sled, and an Alpine backdrop. Then they invited ordinary Cubans to ham it up for the camera with props including faux snowballs. The resulting Polaroids have an appealing, county-fair silliness. But condescension hovers, like a cold front, in the background. Through Aug. 2. (Kent, 67 Prince St. 966-4500.)

"WOMAN/GODDESS"

This exploration of Indian women's relationships to that country's omnipresent goddess iconography—which deifies Indira Gandhi and Mother Teresa alongside Kali and Devi—is full of strong and varied prints. Henri Cartier-Bresson's decisive moments hang alongside reportage and portraits from talented but lesser-known, Indian photographers like Dayanita Singh and Saibal Das. Singh's "Rekha as a Screen Goddess in 'Kismet'" offers an actress before the camera, with technicians kneeling at her feet, as a particularly highly evolved embodiment of the show's subjects—the pedestrian, the divine, and the photogenic. Through Aug. 11. (India Center, 530 W. 25th St. 462-4221.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER

OF PHOTOGRAPHY

1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (860-1777)—Sebastião Salgado's "Migrations: Humanity in Transition." Over the past seven years, Salgado has visited more than thirty-five countries, travelling with and photographing some of the nearly one hundred million migrants now wandering the planet. Viewers who follow international news may be familiar not only with the trouble spots he's been to—Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia among them—but also with these images, some of which have appeared in major American news magazines. Nevertheless, the effect of seeing them, particularly the sweeping landscapes, in immaculate black-and-white prints filling large, open galleries, remains powerful. Finally I.C.P.'s new space hosts a show in line with its original founding mission—to champion the aesthetic and moral virtues of reportage—a show that demonstrates the scale and focus that differentiate it from other venues. Through Sept. 9. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; and Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

JAMES BIDGOOD

Morris, 465 W. 23rd St. 727-2752. Through Aug. 17.

MARIANA COOK

Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 744-7400. Through Aug. 10.

KONRAD CRAMER

Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 752-1223. Through Aug. 3.

"A DOG AND PONY SHOW"

Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223. Through Aug. 3.

"GONE MISSING: BRITISH

CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY"

Frederieke Taylor, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-0992. Through Aug. 1.

"MAGNUM: A COMMUNITY

OF THOUGHT"

Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010.

Through Aug. 4.

"SURF'S UP!"

Meyerowitz, 580 Broadway. 625-3434. Through Aug. 10.

CLASSICAL MUSIC OPERA

NEW YORK GRAND OPERA COMPANY

Vincent La Selva conducts Verdi's "Otello," in a production directed by James Lucas. The G.O.C.'s presentations may not reach the heights of interpretive subtlety, but the singing is usually lusty—and the show is free. With Edward Perretti as the tragic Moor, Judith Von Houser as his wife, Desdemona, and Michael Corvino in the role of Iago. (Central Park Summerstage, Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. July 18 at 7:30. No tickets necessary. The rain date is July 23 at 7:30.)

OPERA FESTIVAL OF NEW JERSEY

July 19 at 7:30: Gina Lapinski directs "The Magic Flute," presented in English, with Lorraine Ernst, Jacqueline Venable, Joseph Kaiser, and Justin Vickers; the conductor is Richard Tang Yuk. Through July 28. ♦ July 20 at 8: Margaret Lattimore and Christine Brandes, two radiant young singers, take the title roles in Gluck's "Orfeo ed Euridice"; David Agler. Through July 29. ♦ July 21 at 8: "Turandot," with Anna Shafajinskaia (in the title role), Allan Glassman, Theresa Cincione, and Scott Altman; Michael Ching. Through July 26. ♦ July 22 at 2: A double bill of Dallapiccola's "Il Prigioniero" and Bartók's "Bluebeard's Castle." With Victor Benedetti, Randolph Locke, Dean Peterson, and Eleni Matos; Patrick Hansen. Through July 27. (McCarter Theatre, Princeton, N.J. 609-258-2787.)

CONCERTS AROUND TOWN

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC CONCERTS IN THE PARKS

Three performances of Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's "The Seven Deadly Sins"—featuring the soprano Audra McDonald—close the summer season; Michael Stern conducts. The rest of the evening is stocked with orchestral showpieces by Ravel and Johann Strauss II and a fireworks display to boot. (Prospect Park Band Shell, Brooklyn. July 18 at 8. ♦ Miller Field, Gateway National Recreation Area, Staten Island. July 20 at 8. ♦ Heckscher State Park, East Islip, Long Island. July 21 at 8.)

INTERNATIONAL KEYBOARD INSTITUTE AND FESTIVAL

The highlights of this international piano program are the recitals given by distinguished faculty. July 18 at 8: Pavlina Dokovska plays Chopin (including the Sonata in B-Flat Minor), Schumann, and Debussy. ♦ July 20 at 8: Ruth Laredo's recital includes music by Schumann, Beethoven (the "Appassionata"), and Ravel, along with a selection of works by Scriabin and Rachmaninoff. ♦ July 21 at 8: The French virtuoso Cyprien Katsaris offers works by Grieg (twelve of the enchanting "Lyric Pieces"), Schumann, and Schubert (the Sonata in B-Flat Major, D. 960). ♦ July 22 at 8: Mykola Suk plays two sonatas by Mozart and Chopin's Preludes. (Mannes College of Music, 150 W. 85th St. 580-0210, ext. 336.)

BARGEMUSIC

July 19-21 at 7:30 and July 22 at 4: Mark Peskanov offers four concerts of the complete Beethoven violin sonatas and other works, with the pianists Paul Ostrovsky and Alexander Peskanov. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

LINCOLN CENTER FESTIVAL

A celebration of the chamber music of Philip Glass (including "Music in Twelve Parts"), performed by the composer and the Philip Glass Ensemble. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. July 21 at 4.)

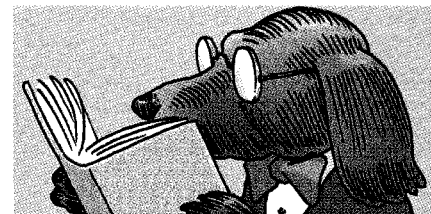
"CROSSCURRENTS" CONCERT SERIES

Klezmer Madness!, led by its electrifying clarinetist, David Krakauer, specializes in mixing traditional Hasidic music with cutting-edge improvisation—and rarely disappoints. (Arthur Ross Terrace and Garden, Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, 2 E. 91st St. July 24 at 6:30. No tickets are necessary, but audience members are requested to bring a blanket for lawn seating.)

BOOK CURRENTS

Life as a Dog

In the U.S., we keep more than fifty million dogs as pets, but in many ways our relationship to them remains mysterious. In **DOGS: A STARTLING NEW UNDERSTANDING OF CANINE ORIGIN, BEHAVIOR, AND EVOLUTION** (Scribner), Raymond and



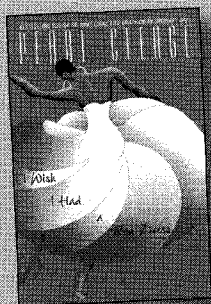
Lorna Coppinger discredit the popular belief that humans created dogs by artificial selection. They suggest that wolves may have evolved into scavengers around early Mesolithic settlements—in other words, dogs may have become our best friends by accident rather than by design. The authors studied the behavior of contemporary village dogs, including the "singing" dogs of New Guinea, who mark their territory with a "musical repertoire" of "modulated yodels and, best of all, a high-pitched trill."

When the 2nd and 3rd War Dog Platoons arrived at Camp Pendleton in the fall of 1943, the elite Marines stationed there were skeptical. But as Captain William W. Putney recounts in **ALWAYS FAITHFUL** (Free Press), a history of the canine Marines, the other troops soon recognized the dogs' potential. The following summer, during the battle for Guam, the dog scouts proved so useful that the Marines asked whether the canine component of their regiment might be decorated as well.

The French sometimes refer to dogs as *bêtes de chagrin*, because they remind us of loss. Roger Grenier's **THE DIFFICULTY OF BEING A DOG** (Chicago), translated from the French by Alice Kaplan, explores the bond between people and dogs and collects descriptions of the dog in literature: Rilke, for example, "refused to love dogs for fear of making them suffer," but other, more freewheeling literary types celebrated them fiercely. A song composed by Edmund Wilson and F. Scott Fitzgerald was often performed at Jazz Age parties: "Larger than a rat! / More faithful than a cat! / Dog! Dog! Dog!"

—Neil Freudenberger

TONY MILLONARE



FESTIVE

Pearl Cleage returns to the world of her bestseller, *What Looks Like Crazy on an Ordinary Day*. After years of service to others, the reliable older sister realizes it's time to slip into a red dress and savor all the excitement that goes with it.

I WISH I HAD A RED DRESS
by Pearl Cleage

Pub. Price: \$24.00

Our Price: \$19.20

Readers' Advantage Price: **\$17.28**

FELINE

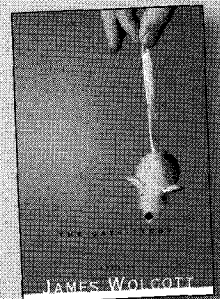
Dumped by a string of girlfriends, Johnny Downs seeks the help of a sassy Southern belle to help him cast off his bachelor habits to become "husband material." Her acerbic and witty crash course will delight men and women alike.

THE CATSITTERS
by James Wolcott

Pub. Price: \$25.00

Our Price: \$20.00

Readers' Advantage Price: **\$18.00**



FAMILY

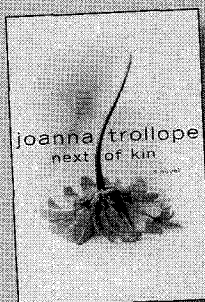
The death of Caro Meredith has upended the lives of her husband Robin and stepdaughter, Judy. When a friend of Judy's arrives from London, she brings a renewed sense of hope and challenges them to confront their loss.

NEXT OF KIN
by Joanna Trollope

Pub. Price: \$23.95

Our Price: \$19.16

Readers' Advantage Price: **\$17.24**



FRINGE

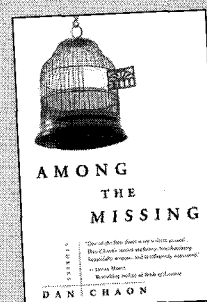
Residing in territory far removed from the American dream, the misbegotten men, women and children in this collection of stories ponder precisely which decision, path or accident brought them to this fated place and why.

AMONG THE MISSING
by Dan Chaon

Pub. Price: \$22.00

Our Price: \$17.60

Readers' Advantage Price: **\$15.84**



FIONA

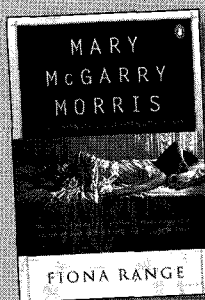
Reckless and beautiful, Fiona Range hits rock bottom when she wakes to find a strange man in her bed. Determined to change, she confronts her past, including a cruel father who denies her and a closet full of dark family secrets.

FIONA RANGE
by Mary McGarry Morris

Pub. Price: \$14.00

Our Price: \$11.20

Readers' Advantage Price: **\$10.08**



FRONTIER

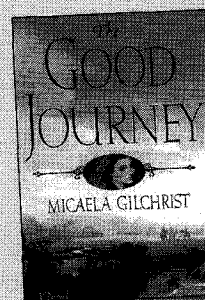
Betrothed to a mysterious General, Mary Bullitt suddenly finds herself en route to a new life in the Western frontier. This historical fiction chronicles two decades of their marriage, including battles with the terrain, the natives and each other.

THE GOOD JOURNEY
by Micaela Gilchrist

Pub. Price: \$24.00

Our Price: \$19.20

Readers' Advantage Price: **\$17.28**



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OUT OF TOWN

MUSIC FESTIVAL OF THE HAMPTONS

July 18 at 8: A recital of Chopin and Rachmaninoff, given by the pianist Vasgen Vartanian. ♦ July 19 at 8: The violinist Phillip Quint, the clarinetist Igor Begelman, and the pianist Tatiana Goncharova present music by Stravinsky, Gershwin, and Paul Schoenfield. ♦ July 20 at 8: Gloria Cheng, a renowned interpreter of twentieth-century music, offers a recital of Stravinsky, Debussy, Messiaen, the composer-conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen, and Thomas Adès. ♦ July 21 at 8: The gala closing concert, with the Canadian Brass. (Festival Tent, Snakehollow Rd., Bridgehampton, N.Y. For more information, call 212-307-7171.)

NEWPORT MUSIC FESTIVAL

The festival concludes in a whirl of concerts, given in the town's grand summer "cottages." Dvořák, this year's official composer, gets his due with several concerts. The Moscow Quartet presents his last three string quartets; the pianists Frederic Chiu, Nelson Goerner, and Piers Lane attack the "Transcendental Études," worthy successors to those of Liszt, by Sergey Lyapunov, in a late-night concert preceded by a champagne reception; "Hail Britannia," a program of Elgar, Bridge, Holst, et al., features the clarinetist Emma Johnson and the hornist Eric Ruske; and a closing gala celebrates the life of Victor Borge, featuring the actor-balladeer Sven-Bertil Taube. (Newport, R.I. For more information, call 401-849-0700. July 18-22.)

TANGLEWOOD

July 18 at 8:30: Mitsuko Uchida, a pianist who brings a delicate, searching touch to the music of the Viennese masters, offers a program of Schubert (two sonatas and the "Moments Musicaux") and Webern (the crystalline Variations, Op. 27). ♦ July 19 at 8:30: Yo-Yo Ma, Emanuel Ax, Pamela Frank, and William Hudgins gather for music by Brahms, Mendelssohn (the Piano Trio No. 2 in C Minor), and the world premiere of "Portraits," by Richard Danielpour (with the mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves). ♦ July 20 at 8:30: Andrew Davis leads the Boston Symphony Orchestra in a program of Beethoven (the Piano Concerto No. 4, with Ax), Delius, and Stravinsky (the Symphony in Three Movements). A chamber concert featuring members of the B.S.O. precedes the orchestral concert, at 6. ♦ July 21 at 8:30: The "Four Sacred Pieces," for chorus and orchestra, are Verdi's farewell to his art: they combine the purity of Palestrina's counterpoint with the depth and mystery of Wagnerian harmony, and, of course, Verdi's own genius for melody and drama. As meditations from the end of life, Walt Whitman's last poems are their only equals. Seiji Ozawa conducts the B.S.O. and the Tanglewood Festival Chorus; if they do their job well, Brahms's imposing Piano Concerto No. 1 (with Peter Serkin) will almost sound like an afterthought. ♦ July 22 at 2:30: James Conlon conducts the Brahms Violin Concerto (with Frank Peter Zimmermann) and excerpts from Wagner's operas. ♦ July 23 at 8:30: A recital by the pianist Yefim Bronfman, who brings his grand, Romantic style to works by Brahms, Berg, Prokofiev (the Sonata No. 7), and Esa-Pekka Salonen. ♦ July 24-25 at 8: Ozawa and Robert Spano conduct advanced vocal and instrumental students from the Tanglewood Music Center in Ravel's operas "L'Enfant et les Sortilèges" and "L'Heure Espagnole," the latter fully staged. (Lenox, Mass. 617-266-1200.)

CARAMOOR

July 19 at 4:30: The young Chinese pianist Mei-Ting Sun presents music by Bach, Bartók, Rachmaninoff (the Preludes, Op. 23), and the contemporary composer Robert Cuckson. ♦ July 20 at 8:00: There is something very special about the new-music group Eighth Blackbird: they're friendly, unpretentious, idealistic, and highly skilled (not unusual traits for graduates of Oberlin College), an ensemble of strings, winds, percussion, and piano which can appeal as much to the Brooks Brothers set as to the black-clad longhairs of the downtown

scene. They present music by Michael Torke, Daniel Kellogg, and Frederick Rzewski (including the quirky and beguiling "Pocket Symphony") at the Venetian Theatre. ♦ July 21 at 8: The conductor-critic Will Crutchfield returns to conduct a concert version of Verdi's "Otello," with the soprano Indra Thomas, the tenor Frank Porretta III, the baritone Genaro Sulvarán, and the Orchestra of St. Luke's. ♦ July 22 at 4:30: Mitsuko Uchida brings her Schubert-Webern Tanglewood program to Caramoor. (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252.)

NORFOLK CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

July 20 at 8: A bouquet of Vivaldi concertos, performed by the flutist Carol Wincenc, the hornist William Purvis, and others. ♦ July 21 at 8: The Tokyo String Quartet plays music by Schubert, Bartók (the Quartet No. 6), and Brahms. (Ellen Battell Stoeckel Estate, Routes 44 and 272, Norfolk, Conn. 860-542-3000.)

SOUTH SHORE MUSIC SERIES:

PHILHARMONIA QUARTETT BERLIN

Four of the Berlin Philharmonic's principal string players offer a program of Mozart, Szymanowski, and Beethoven (the Op. 130 quartet and the "Grosse Fuge"). (Saugatuck Congregational Church, 245 Post Rd. E., Westport, Conn. July 20 at 8. For more information, call 203-227-0695.)

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA

July 21 at 8 and July 23 at 2: A new production of Handel's "Agrippina," directed by Lillian Groag, with Alexandra Coku, Beth Clayton, Karen Wierzb, Derrick Parker, and David Walker; Harry Bicket conducts. ♦ July 22 at 2: Mozart's "Le Nozze di Figaro," with Dean Ely, Joyce Guyer, Nicole Heaston, Valerie Komar, and Christopher Schaldenbrand; George Manahan. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

MARLBORO MUSIC FESTIVAL

The legendary festival offers chamber concerts each weekend through Aug. 12; programs are announced one week in advance on the festival's Web site (www.marlbormusic.org). (Marlboro, Vt. 802-254-2394. July 20-22.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN

An afternoon of Beethoven, Prokofiev, and Brahms (the String Sextet No. 1 in B-Flat Major), given by the Whitman String Quartet (winners of the 1998 Naumburg Award) and special guests. (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126. July 22 at 3.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

REAPPEARING ACTS

The Sullivan Street Playhouse may have a special power—the home of the eternal musical "The Fantastics" also happens to be the site of the city's longest-running Off Broadway magic show, "Monday Night Magic." Granted, this weekly production has only been running for four years, but for a magic show in New York City these days that's a lifetime. Ever since Gotham lost its major magic showplace, Carmine Street's "Mostly Magic," in 1993, this revue has been the place for disappearing doves and humorous illusions. Its longevity can be traced to the quality of the regulars who headline here—performers include the Patterson, New Jersey, tough guy and sleight-of-hand expert Rocco; the outstanding card man Jamy Ian Swiss; and the English television veteran Simon Lovell. "It's not just that same comedic magician you've seen on a cruise ship," the producer and performer Michael Chaut says. There is, however, at least one similarity to travelling abroad. Among Chaut's specialties is pickpocketing. Watch yourself during intermission. (181 Sullivan St. Mondays at 8. For more information, call 615-6432.)

READINGS

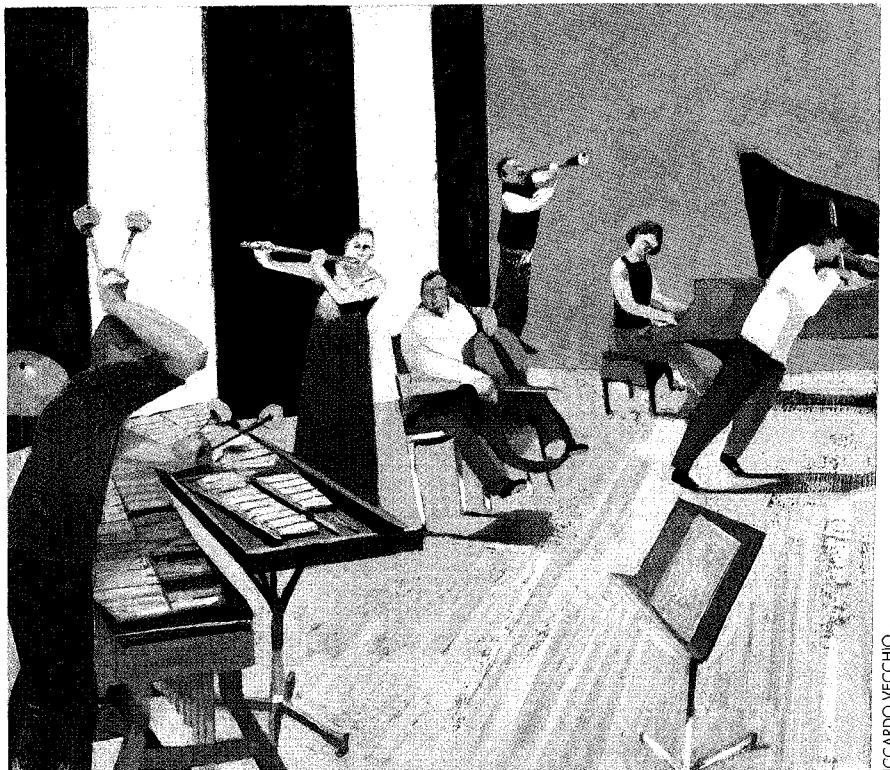
July 18 at 7:30: By Tom Spanbauer, from his novel "In the City of Shy Hunters." (Barnes & Noble, 675 Sixth Ave.) ♦ July 23 at 7: By Jeff Sharra, from his book "Rise to Rebellion." (Lincoln Triangle, 1972 Broadway.)

TALK

July 18 at 7: By Phillip Rose, a Broadway producer and the author of "You Can't Do That on Broadway! A Raisin in the Sun and Other Theatrical Improbabilities." Rose will also sign his book. (Lincoln Triangle, 1972 Broadway.)

TOUR

July 19 at 9:30 A.M.: Tour the Villard Houses, the landmark late-eighteenth-century residences that are now part of the Palace Hotel, and learn about their history. (For reservations, which are required, call 935-3960.) ♦ July 22 at 1: A tour entitled "From Bond Street to the Bowery: The Rise and Fall of a Neighborhood." (Merchant's House Museum, 29 E. 4th St. 777-1089.)



The contemporary-music ensemble Eighth Blackbird performs at Caramoor on July 20.

MOVIES OPENING

AMERICA'S SWEETHEARTS

A movie-star couple (Catherine Zeta-Jones and John Cusack) must pretend to be in love during a press junket for their new film, in this comedy directed by Joe Roth. With Julia Roberts and Billy Crystal. Opening July 20.

BROTHER

Takeshi Kitano plays a yakuza enforcer who sparks a turf war in Los Angeles, in a crime thriller he wrote and directed. With Omar Epps. Opening July 20.

GHOST WORLD

An adaptation of the comic by Daniel Clowes, about the friendship between two alienated teenage girls. With Thora Birch, Scarlett Johansson, and Steve Buscemi. Directed by Terry Zwigoff ("Crumb"). Opening July 20.

HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH

John Cameron Mitchell wrote and directed this adaptation of his Off Broadway musical about a transsexual German immigrant living in Kansas, in which he also plays the lead. Opening July 20.

JURASSIC PARK III

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening July 20.

FILM NOTES

A.I.

An extraordinarily accomplished failure. After dithering with this project for years, Stanley Kubrick bequeathed it to Steven Spielberg, who wrote his own screenplay after Kubrick's death. In the bleak world that remains after the polar ice cap has melted, David (Haley Joel Osment), a perfect-child robot programmed to love, so disturbs his neurotic mother (Frances O'Connor) that she turns him loose in the woods. There he hooks up with a friendly stud-gigolo robot (Jude Law, who is certainly more beautiful than anything human). At that point, the movie should have taken off as the story of a science-fiction Pinocchio—a toy who wants to be human—but despite many uncanny moments and some extraordinary visual invention, "A.I.," which appears to celebrate the end of human existence, leaves one in a depressed stupor.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 7/2/01.) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Coronet Cinema, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, Village Theatre VII, and Ziegfeld.)

THE ANNIVERSARY PARTY

Alan Cumming as a charming but volatile bisexual writer who is about to direct a big-budget movie; Jennifer Jason Leigh as a neurotic actress who screws up her roles by turning everything into tragedy. In Los Angeles, they throw an anniversary party, invite their friends, get tanked, and then take Ecstasy, at which point everything begins to fall apart. Cumming and Jason Leigh wrote and directed this house-party picture together, and shot it quickly in digital video with various friends and colleagues (Kevin Kline, Phoebe Cates, Gwyneth Paltrow, Parker Posey). The movie has the kind of intensity that actors love—scenes of confrontation, breakdown, and self-revelation—but it's neither well constructed nor particularly original.—*D.D.* (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

BABY BOY

The singer Tyrese Gibson stars as a whiny, going-nowhere man living in South Central L.A. in this attempt at epic family-film-making by the writer-director John Singleton. He means to explore the directionless lives of young men who refuse to shoulder responsibility, but he's made a movie as meandering as one of his lost souls.—*Bruce Diones* (Asor Plaza, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

BAISE-MOI

Two women on the margins—a waif (Raffaella Anderson) and a prostitute (Karen Bach)—hit the road



and go on a binge of screwing and senseless killing in this would-be shocker from France. The spectacle is meant to be stunningly amoral, yet the movie, from scene to scene, and from shot to shot, is such an incoherent mess that it has almost no emotional impact. The directors Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi undress everybody and spill lots of blood; they must have thought they would compromise the purity of their violence by learning basic moviemaking. In French.—*D.D.* (Cinema Village.)

BARFLY

The sixty-seven-year-old L.A. poet Charles Bukowski wrote this semiautobiographical script about his heavy-drinking skid-row days just after the Second World War, when he was a scrappy young man. But Mickey Rourke, who plays the role, imitates the tortoise movements of the battle-scarred survivor Bukowski, the writer-philosopher, the sage. This howler gives this 1987 movie a comic boost. Rourke twinkles with amusement at doing Bukowski, and the two principal women (Faye Dunaway as a burned-out drinker, Alice Krige as a wealthy publisher of a literary magazine) twinkle back. It's a film about the leader of a religious cult which was made by an altar boy. The director, Barbet Schroeder, wanting to please the Master, inadvertently exposes Bukowski's messianic windbag sensibility at its most self-satisfied.—*Pauline Kael* (Museum of Modern Art; July 24.)

THE BLUE ANGEL

In this 1928 film, the director Josef von Sternberg and the actor Emil Jannings set in motion the Marlene Dietrich myth that was eventually to surpass their fame. As a night-club singer, Dietrich's smoldering voice and sadistic indifference suggest sex without romance, love, or sentiment. She's extraordinary, and "The Blue Angel" is a movie you can admire sequence by sequence, because it's made in an imaginative, atmospheric style, yet you may feel that you don't really like it on an emotional level; the sexual humiliation gets very heavy in the scenes in which the professor Dietrich seduced, now a clown, returns to his home town. In German.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; July 18-26.)

CATS & DOGS

Small children should enjoy Lawrence Guterman's homely fantasy, with its mixture of low, sniffing humor and high-tech effects. Jeff Goldblum and Elizabeth Perkins, who surely can't need the money that badly, play a couple who lose their pooch and replace it with a beagle. Like most beagles, this one is a first-time secret agent sent to foil a worldwide conspiracy of cats. The plot is Chihuahua-light, and there are many scenes that should have been scooped and thrown away. The animals perform in contorted live-action, with the voices of Tobey Maguire, Susan Sarandon, and others issuing uncomfortably from canine lips. How can one movie be both cute and utterly charmless? With Charlton Heston, brilliantly cast as a mastiff's growl, and Alexander Pollock as the nerdy kid from hell.—*Anthony Lane* (7/9/01) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square.)

CRAZY/BEAUTIFUL

Nicole (Kirsten Dunst), the messed-up daughter of a liberal, rich, white congressman (Bruce Davison), falls in love at her Los Angeles high school with Carlos (Jay Hernandez), a working-class boy of Mexican descent who believes in sobriety, obedience, and getting good grades. The two writers, Phil Hay and Matt Manfredi, and the director, John Stockwell, have some serious fun spinning out the class and ethnic ironies, and Dunst, who wears stressed jeans and little tops that terminate five inches above her navel, plays the alcoholic and self-loathing Nicole as if her life depended on it. Within the limits of teen romance—and the limits, too, of family drama—the movie is honest, straightforward, and touching.—*D.D.* (7/16/01) (East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Sutton 1 and 2, and Village Theatre VII.)

DR. DOLITTLE 2

Eddie Murphy talks to the animals again in this mercifully short, briskly directed sequel to his 1998 hit. As wildlife's favorite veterinarian, Murphy facilitates a romance between a circus bear (voiced by the incomparable Steve Zahn) and an endangered female bear while trying to save a forest from destruction. It's a good-natured film that offers the welcome tonic of a blend of talented voices rising above the summer-movie bombast.—*B.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square.)

DOWNTOWN 81

Jean Michel Basquiat starred in this New York fable in 1981, when he was nineteen. In the past few years, the film's art director (Maripol) and screenwriter (Glenn O'Brien) found some misplaced reels, redubbed some of the dialogue, and are just now releasing the patchwork result. The movie is set in a crumbling Lower East Side and captures Basquiat as a great urban improviser, someone who walks the sidewalks unencumbered, finding inspiration in chance and accident. Deborah Harry of Blondie, Walter Steding, and Fab 5 Freddy all appear, and there are also performances by James White and the Blacks, the Plastics, DNA, and Melle Mel.—*Michael Agger* (The Screening Room.)

THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS

The scene: the street-racing subculture of Los Angeles. The characters: a charismatic leader and possible hijacker (the superbly named Vin Diesel), ready-to-rumble female grease monkeys with bare midriffs (including Michelle Rodriguez), and a handsome undercover cop (Paul Walker) who infiltrates the car-racing gang and develops ambiguous loyalties. Rob Cohen, the director, tries hard for B-movie schlock magic, and attains it during the high-speed car chases, which are genuinely exciting. See this when you are too tired to think.—*D.D.* (7/16/01) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Union Square.)

KISS OF THE DRAGON

The tiny, mild-looking Jet Li, playing a Chinese secret agent, shows up in Paris and joins a team of rogue French cops led by Tchécya Karyo, who rushes about like a madman, screaming profanities in English. Gone are the balletic wonders of the Hong Kong cinema. Westernizing the genre, Luc Besson (who wrote and produced; the film was directed by Chris Nahon) shoots up the lobby of the Ritz and destroys an innocent *bateau-mouche* cruising the Seine. Jet Li is fun to watch, but in a series of absurdly bloody battles he winds up killing most of the Paris police. Some of the cinematography, by Thierry Arbogast, is stylishly dark and moody, but by the time you notice it you may be past caring.—*D.D.* (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

LARA CROFT: TOMB RAIDER

Guns strapped to her thighs, her lower lip as radically cleft as Kirk Douglas's chin, Angelina Jolie leaps and bungee-jumps her way through action sequences as Lara Croft, upper-class English adventurer. Jolie is cocksure and insinuating; she gets by just fine on pure attitude—acting isn't required. Simon West is the unimaginative, humorless director; the movie was "written" by Patrick Massett

and John Zinman.—*D.D.* (Battery Park 16, 42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

LEGALLY BLONDE

The fabulous Elle Woods (Reese Witherspoon), a West Coast sorority queen, follows her escaping boyfriend to Harvard Law School, where she shows up wearing leather and carrying a Chihuahua in her arms. The first-time director Robert Luketic displays a talent for candied artifice and gentle parody: the scenes in the sorority house are so stylized they could be out of an old M.G.M. musical, complete with pink-on-pink décor and squealing girls who are both silly and likable. But "Legally Blonde" collapses very quickly into low-grade farce. Almost everyone at Harvard is a jerk or a phony, and the plot, including a murder trial, is sitcom-obvious. See it only for the talented Witherspoon, who manages to embody the *Cosmo* girl, Lancôme to the hilt.—*D.D.* (7/16/01) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Union Square, and Waverly.)

LIFE AND DEBT

This documentary, directed by Stephanie Black, concerns the effects of globalization and multinational corporations on the island of Jamaica. What could have been a dry-as-dirt lecture on the evils of banking, the closings of farms, and unfair import practices gets shaped by the filmmaker into a comprehensive and involving film about the pillaging of a beautiful island and its people. The poetic, incisive narration is by Jamaica Kincaid.—*B.D.* (The Screening Room.)

LUMUMBA

Raoul Peck tells the story of the African freedom fighter Patrice Lumumba with fire and grace. The opening scene sets the *vérité* tone with the sound of a saw cutting through bone; two Belgian soldiers are breaking down Lumumba's body and incinerating it in a ten-gallon drum. From there, the film backtracks to the origins of the Congolese independence movement and proceeds to explain how a man's legacy could be considered so threatening. Peck handles all of this, including the atrocities, with refinement, and lets the drama of Lumumba's story run smoothly, free of heavy historical detail. Eric Ebouaney is extraordinary in the lead role, the production feels emotionally true, and the speeches generate spontaneous applause. Only the ending comes off as too hopeful: after Lumumba's death, the regime of Mobutu began. In French and Lingala.—*M.A.* (BAM Rose Cinemas and Film Forum.)

MADE

Jon Favreau and Vince Vaughn reprise their Mutt-and-Jeff act from "Swingers," but this time in a context uncertainly derived from Martin Scorsese's "Mean Streets." A nasty Los Angeles crime boss (Peter Falk) sends the two men—amateurs as criminals—to New York to do a job. The heavyset Favreau is morose and fearful and just wants to come home in one piece; Vaughn, boastful, unreliable, and stupid, has the time of his life. Favreau, who wrote and directed, veers back and forth between comedy and a more serious tone, and the movie winds up suspended in the air. The two actors try to pull the entire story out of their friendship with each other, but the psychological underpinnings are missing: we never really understand what holds this odd couple together. With Sean (Puffy) Combs, viciously incisive as a downtown Manhattan gangster, and Famke Janssen in a vaguely written part as a lap dancer.—*D.D.* (Union Square.)

MOULIN ROUGE

A frantically ambitious postmodernist musical in which no single song is performed from beginning to end and no dance number is staged without the dancers' movements' being kaleidoscoped into a dozen angles. Set in a stylized and digitalized Paris, the movie offers the Moulin Rouge night club as a seething Belle Époque Studio 54, where a fresh-from-the-provinces poet named Christian (Ewan McGregor) falls in love with Satine (Nicole Kidman), a consumptive cancan dancer and courtesan. The story is no more than a flimsy outline, but it still manages to combine the Orpheus myth and "Camille" and to vaguely evoke about a dozen other films. Baz Luhrmann, the director, has a talent for décor, sudden shifts in perspective, and gentle, twinkling nighttime

effects, but he whips much of the movie into an opéra-bouffe clownishness.—*D.D.* (5/28/01) (Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Murray Hill Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Village East Cinemas.)

PEARL HARBOR

At three hours, the new Michael Bay film lasts longer than the historical event it purports to describe. Ben Affleck and Josh Hartnett star as a couple of boyhood friends—one bumptious, the other shy—who join the army together, play aerial chicken together, and even fall in love with the same girl (Kate Beckinsale). The movie feels big and baggy rather than epic, and, by the end, the stitching has come apart; you never quite believe in the spate of digital effects, let alone in the weaving of war and romance.—*A.L.* (6/4/01) (Empire 25, Lincoln Square, Sutton 1 and 2, and Village East Cinemas.)

THE PRINCESS AND THE WARRIOR

Two damaged people—a sweet-tempered nurse (Franka Potente) who lives and works in a psychiatric ward and a surly tough guy (Benno Fürmann) mysteriously waylaid by sadness—are drawn together, seemingly by fate. But isn't fate just another name for an overlapping pattern of need and desire? The writer-director Tom Tykwer, who earlier made "Run Lola Run," works less kinetically this time. He varies the tempo: there are meditative passages punctuated by abrupt outbreaks of emotion—a mesmerizing new style that draws us into mysteries in an intuitive rather than explicit way. A strange, accomplished romantic drama. In German.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE PUMPKIN EATER

Jack Clayton's underrated 1964 version of the Penelope Mortimer novel, with a script by Harold Pinter and a fine cast headed by Ann Bancroft. Her performance as the (compulsively childbearing) Englishwoman whose nerves are giving out has an unusual tentative, exploratory quality. It's a stunning, high-style film—fragmented yet flowing. The murky sexual tensions have a fascination, and there are memorable moments: Bancroft's crack-up in Harrods; glimpses of James Mason being prurient and vindictive; and Maggie Smith being a troublemaking other woman.—*P.K.* (Walter Reade Theatre; July 23-24.)

THE SCORE

An intelligent and rather overcivilized caper movie, set in Montreal, which features three generations of great male actors: Marlon Brando (sounding like his long-ago nemesis Truman Capote) as an upper-class aesthete and fence with exquisite manners, Robert De Niro as a saturnine jazz-club owner and safecracker who never takes risks, and Edward Norton as a brilliant but willful young con man and criminal. Their goal: to steal a fabulous royal sceptre from France which has been impounded by the Montreal customs house. Much of the movie consists of the men trying to gain the upper hand on one another, and the acting is so relaxed and skillful that one can enjoy the smooth precision as a virtue in itself. Unfortunately, the writers, Kario Salem, Lem Dobbs, and Scott Marshall Smith, and the director, Frank Oz, worked out the plot without working out how the audience should feel about anything that happens. Emotionally the movie is neutered, and Oz seems to have trouble deciding whether he's making a thriller or another version of his double-cross comedy "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels."—*D.D.* (Battery Park 16, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII.)

SEXY BEAST

A tale of expatriate Cockneys, dry-roasted by the Spanish sun and determined to get England off their backs. Gal (Ray Winstone), once a crook, and his wife, Deedee (Amanda Redman), once a porno star, have retired to the Costa del Sol; now they are tracked down by an old acquaintance, Don (Ben Kingsley), who invites Gal back home for one last crime. Jonathan Glazer, the young British director making his debut feature, turns the first half of the picture into a cool study of hotheads, saturated with creative cursing; the second half, which finds Gal returning to London, stumbles and slides into the grim traditions of gangsterland. But the movie needs to be seen for its clean compositions, its sure touch of fan-

tasy, and, above all, for the forbidding presence of Kingsley—the prince of darkness, lightly disguised as a human being.—*A.L.* (6/18 & 25/01) (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

SHREK

The Shrek of the title is a bile-green ogre with disgusting personal habits and, this being an animated feature, an essential sweetness of nature. The new DreamWorks production is overtly snook-cocking, turning every available fairy tale on its head: the princess has a short temper and karate skills, the dragon has the hots for a donkey, and the lord's castle is as tacky as a theme park. On the other hand, the film itself is hardly rough and real; however cunning the rendering of surfaces, there's still something flat and charmless in the digital look, and most of the pleasure rises not from the main romance but from the quick, incidental gags. With voices by Mike Myers, Cameron Diaz, Eddie Murphy, and John Lithgow.—*A.L.* (5/21/01) (Battery Park 16, 42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

STARTUP.COM

A fascinating *cinéma-vérité* documentary account of how two very young men—Kaleil Isaza Tuzman, a Goldman, Sachs employee, and Tom Herman, a techie—started an Internet company in New York, burned through sixty million dollars, lost their way, and got swallowed up by another company, all within eighteen months. The filmmakers Jehane Noujaim and Chris Hegedus nosed their way into meetings and arguments and drove around with the two men as they aired their desires and fears. Tuzman is burly and handsome, with an easy, ready way about him; Herman, who keeps growing and shaving a dark beard, is high-minded and tends to be diffident about the fate of the enterprise itself. The movie's account of their dealings with each other is painfully funny and very intimate, perhaps too much so: it would have been useful to have more detail about how the business actually worked and why it went wrong.—*D.D.* (5/14/01) (Village East Cinemas.)

THAT OBSCURE OBJECT OF DESIRE

Luis Buñuel's style here is peerlessly urbane, but this 1977 film is a little monotonous. Fernando Rey plays a rich, worldly French widower of perhaps fifty, who loves a Spanish girl; she alternates between promises and postponement—she teases him, fleeces him, enrages him. In this fifth movie version of "La Femme et le Pantin," Pierre Louÿs's short novel about a femme fatale, the role is played by two actresses—Carole Bouquet, a tall French girl, poker-faced except for a squint of amusement and a foxy, crooked smear of a smile, and Angela Molina, a shorter, more rounded Spanish girl, who's physically impulsive, and sensual in a traditional heavy-eyed way. This doubling-up stunt doesn't add any meaning; perhaps a single actress would have better captured our imaginations. Buñuel sets up the Louÿs story, then treats it glancingly as a joke to hang other jokes on—and his jokes now don't have the violence underneath to make connections for us. His style is too serene for his subject. In French.—*P.K.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

ALSO PLAYING

BULLY

Angelika Film Center.

EVERYBODY'S FAMOUS!

Angelika Film Center and Cinema II.

FINAL FANTASY: THE SPIRITS WITHIN

Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.

HIMALAYA

Cinema Village and 59th Street East Cinema.

JUMP TOMORROW

Angelika Film Center.

LOST AND DELIRIOUS

Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.

MEMENTO (3/19/01)

First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, State, and Village East Cinemas.

SCARY MOVIE 2

Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Waverly.

THE VERTICAL RAY OF THE SUN

Eastside Playhouse and Quad Cinema.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.

Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.

BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.

Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St. (945-3418).

Beckman, Second Ave. at 66th St.

Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.

Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.

Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.

Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.

Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.

Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).

Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.

East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.

East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.

84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.

Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).

59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St. Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).

First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.

42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.

Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.

Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.

Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.

Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.

Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.

New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.

19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.

Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.

Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.

Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).

Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.

Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).

Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.

The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).

72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.

64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.

62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.

State, Broadway at 45th St.

Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.

Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.

Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.

Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600).

Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.

Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Wednesdays, starting at dusk: Free outdoor movies at the Socrates Sculpture Park (Broadway at Vernon Blvd.) in Queens. The feature on July 18 is "Pericles in America" (1988, John Cohen). ♦ Through Sept. 9: "Hollywood on the Home Front: American Film in the 1940's." July 21 at 2: "Citizen Kane" (1941, Orson Welles). ♦ July 21 at 4:15: "Casablanca" (1942, Michael Curtiz). ♦ July 22 at 1: "Twelve O'Clock High" (1949, Henry King). ♦ July 22 at 3:30: "Since You Went Away" (1944, John Cromwell). ♦ Repertory night. July 21-22 at 6:30: "The Garden of the Finzi-Continis" (1971, Vittorio De Sica; in Italian).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Through July 22: The "Sound & Vision" festival. July 18 at 7: "Rock 'N' Roll High School" (1979, Allan Arkush). ♦ July 18 at 9: "The Decline of Western Civilization" (1981, Penelope Spheeris). ♦ July 19 at 7, July 21 at 3, and July 22 at 5: "Jazz on a Summer's Day" (1959, Bert Stern). ♦ July 19 at 9, July 20 at 7, July 21 at 11, and July 22 at 7: "The T.A.M.I. Show" (1964, Steve Binder). ♦ July 20 at 9, July 21 at 7, and July 22 at 9: "Ornette: Made in America" (1986, Shirley Clarke). ♦ July 20 at 11 and July 21 at 9: "The Cool World" (1963, Clarke). ♦ July 21 at 5 and July 22 at 3: "Inside Out in the Open" (2001, Alan Roth).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (777-3456)—Brooklyn independent night. July 18 at 4:30, 6:30, and 9:30: "Keep the River on Your Right: A Modern Cannibal Tale" (2001, David and Laurie Gwen Shapiro). ♦ The yakuza movies of Kinji Fukasaku. All films are in Japanese. July 19 at 6:50 and 9:10: "Graveyard of Honor and Humanity" (1975). ♦ July 20 at 6:50 and 9:10: "Wolves, Pigs, and People" (1964). ♦ July 24 at 6:50 and 9:20: "Shogun's Samurai" (1978). ♦ A series of the "best undistributed films" selected by the *Village Voice*. July 21 at 2, 4:20, 6:40, and 9:40 and July 22 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "La Captive" (2000, Chantal Akerman; in French). The critic Amy Taubin will lead a discussion after the 6:40 screening on July 21. ♦ July 23 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "Splendor" (1999, Gregg Araki).

BRYANT PARK

Sixth Ave. at 42nd St.—Mondays, starting at dusk: free drive-in-style moviegoing. The feature on July 23 is "Rear Window" (1954, Alfred Hitchcock).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through July 26 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50: "The Blue Angel" (†).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL

55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Through Aug. 14: "Women Behind the Camera." All films are in French. July 24 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "The Taste of Others" (1999, Agnès Jaoui).

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (360-4321)—Through July 28: Italian cinematography. July 18 and July 21 at 7: "The Insider" (1999, Michael Mann). ♦ July 20 at 7 and July 21 at 3: "The Legend of the Holy Drinker" (1988, Ermanno Olmi; in Italian).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Tishman Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through July 22: "Shaking Up the Box," a tribute to the Independent Television Service. July 19 at 3:30 and July 22 at 12:30: "Homecoming . . . Sometimes I Am Haunted by Memories of Red Dirt and Clay" (1999, Charlene Gilbert) and "First Person Plural" (2000, Deann Borshay). ♦ July 19 at 6 and July 21 at 3: "Black Is . . . Black Ain't" (1995, Marlon Riggs). ♦ July 20 at 3:30: "If I Can't Do It" (1998, Walter Brock) and "School Prayer: A Community at War" (1999, Slawomir Prunberg). ♦ July 20 at 6: "United States of Poetry: Land and the People" (1995, Mark Pellington) and "Backbone of the World: The Blackfeet" (1997, George Burdeau). ♦ July 20 at 8: "Stranger with a Camera" (2000, Elizabeth Barrett). ♦ July 21 at 1: "W.I.S.O.R." (2000, Michel Negroponte). ♦ July 21 at 5: "Kids Spots, Part II" (1994-99). ♦ "Still Life with Animated Dogs" (2001, Paul Fierlinger), and "Death by Design" (1996, Peter Friedman and Jean-François Brunet). ♦ July 22 at 3: "Seeing Through Walls" (1997, Carlos Avila) and "Moscow X" (1993, Ken Kobland). ♦ July 22 at 5: "Coming Out Under Fire" (1994, Arthur Dong). ♦ Three films by the director Barbet Schroeder. July 23 at 3:30: "Reversal of Fortune" (1990). ♦ July 24 at 3:30: "Barfly" (†). ♦ July 24 at 6: "Our Lady of the Assassins" (2000). ♦ July 23 at 6: A restored print of the silent film "Under the Antioquian Sky" (1925, Arturo Acevedo Vallarino). ♦ **THE MUSEUM OF TELEVISION & RADIO** 25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—Through Sept. 16: "Hello, Goodbye," screenings of pilots, premières, and final episodes of classic television shows. Thursdays through Sundays at 3. ♦ Restored silent films with full orchestration. July 20 at 6 and July 21-22 at 2: "The Blot" (1921, Lois Weber).



HIGH COUNTRY *Summer in a ski town, circa 1978: the lifts are closed, and only the locals remain. Nothing to do except paint houses, sell lids of grass, and sacrifice a pig to the snow god Ullr. This is the laid-back mountain life captured in "Scrapple," a Colorado cult film that's screening at the Pioneer this week. Two brothers, Geoffrey and Christopher Hanson, made the movie in Telluride in the late nineties, and they re-create a motley tribe of pleasure seekers living in a pre-condo era. The film's Aussie bartender sums up their quest: "Headed out looking for Nirvana. This might not be it, but the back yard's not too bad."*

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

1 Bowling Green (514-3737)—Through Oct. 27: "At the Movies," films about or directed by Native Americans. July 21 at 2: The New York premiere of "The Doe Boy" (2001, Randy Redroad).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through July 19: The New York Video Festival. ♦ July 20 at 7:30: "Ben-Hur" (1926, Fred Niblo; silent), with live piano accompaniment by Sara Davis Buechner. ♦ Through July 31: A tribute to Harold Pinter. July 21 at 3:30 and 8:30, July 23 at 1 and 6, and July 24 at 3:15: "The Pumpkin Eater" (†). ♦ July 21 at 6 and July 23 at 3:30 and 8:30: "The Go-Between" (1971, Joseph Losey). ♦ July 22 at 3:30 and 8: "Accident" (1967, Losey). ♦ July 22 at 5:45: "The Servant" (1963, Losey). ♦ July 24 at 1: "The Comfort of Strangers" (1991, Paul Schrader).

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LINCOLN
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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT VANISHING POINT



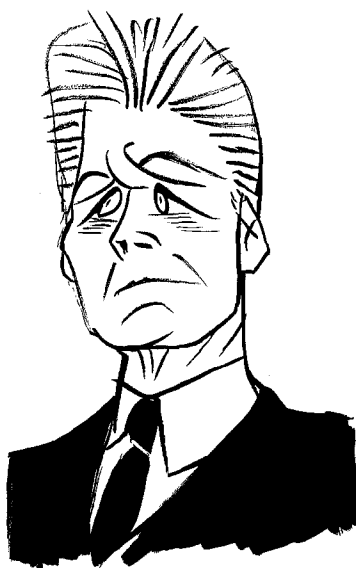
A curious feature of the news industry's sensation of the moment, non-Hamptons division, is that somebody has taken a stand against covering it. The sensation is, of course, the story of the missing Washington intern, Chandra Levy, and her lover, Representative Gary Condit, Democrat of California. The holdout is not the *Times*, or PBS's "Newshour," or even the *Christian Science Monitor*, all of which have received their draft notices and, with varying degrees of sullenness, have reported for duty alongside the eager volunteers from the tabloids and the cable news channels. Amid this general mobilization, the lone conscientious objector is the "CBS Evening News." Its refusal, thus far, to devote so much as a sound bite to the sad and tawdry tale is not a corporate one. (CBS's morning-chat "Early Show" has played the story big.) The decision, remarkably, seems instead to have been a kind of protest. "I turned on morning TV and I was sick to my stomach," Jim Murphy, the show's executive producer, explained to the *Washington Post*, adding, "I just find it beyond tasteless. It's nauseating." The program's anchor put it more tactfully. "I am very comfortable with what we're doing,"

Dan Rather told *USA Today*. "We are applying our standards, not passing judgment on anyone else's."

It has been suggested—by Jerry Nachman, a former editor of the *New York Post*—that this application of standards is an exercise in niche marketing. ("I think this is also a strategic position that CBS News has taken, and I don't necessarily condemn them for it," Nachman said on CNN. "They're trying to differentiate themselves.") This seems a trifle cynical. Why not credit Murphy and Rather with a sincere, if quixotic, disinclination to join the pack? Whatever the eventual outcome, an argument can still be made, though just barely, that Ms. Levy's disappearance is more of a local police-blotter story than one that war-

rants extensive coverage on a program that is nominally devoted to the most important national and international developments of the day. At the moment, the District of Columbia alone has a hundred and twenty-six active missing-persons cases. Two years ago, a promising young government lawyer, Joyce Chiang, suddenly vanished. A California congressman in whose office she had been an intern, Howard Berman, involved himself in the search for her. Three months later, her body was found washed up from the Potomac River. The case remains unsolved. What little news coverage her disappearance received was almost all local. The networks simply ignored it.

The Condit-Levy case may or may not be an important national news story, but it is undeniably a story. It has mystery, pathos, a glamorous setting, and a photogenic cast of characters. Above all, it has what the Joyce Chiang case conspicuously lacked: sexual intrigue, and plenty of it. According to a landmark study of American sexuality conducted at the University of Chicago in the nineteen-nineties, roughly five per cent of married men have extramarital sex in any given year. This would suggest that about twenty congressmen and senators are having or have recently had an affair. The actual number may be considerably higher, because the job requires its holders to travel frequently and meet lots of admiring strangers, accustoms them to being treated deferentially, and tends to attract males of the alpha, or



Gary Condit

at least beta, variety. When one of these affairs finds its way into the papers, there is usually a reason, or, failing that, a pretext.

The Condit-Levy case recalls certain elements of the stories of J.F.K. and Mary Pinchot Meyer, Edward Kennedy and Mary Jo Kopechne, Gary Hart and Donna Rice. Its most obvious echoes—very much to the point where the cable shouters are concerned—are of the Bill Clinton–Monica Lewinsky saga: a handsome, married, philandering New Democrat politician in his fifties; a dark-haired, naïve, voluptuous intern from California in her early twenties; a desperate web of lies woven in a doomed effort to keep a secret. But the differences are as large as the difference in power between a President and a congressional backbencher. The only thing Clinton's lies might have concealed was a private embarrassment; the investigative processes he obstructed had been crafted to trap him. By contrast, no one was out to get Gary Condit, and the young woman with whom he was intensely and illicitly involved is missing and feared dead. Condit's lie about that involvement hampered a preëxisting police investigation which, once it started inquiring into Chandra Levy's whereabouts and state of mind, led naturally to her private life and then, quite properly, to his. To have thought it would do otherwise is as absurd as imagining that the media—Jim Murphy and Dan Rather excepted, of course—can resist a salacious ratings-booster of a story.

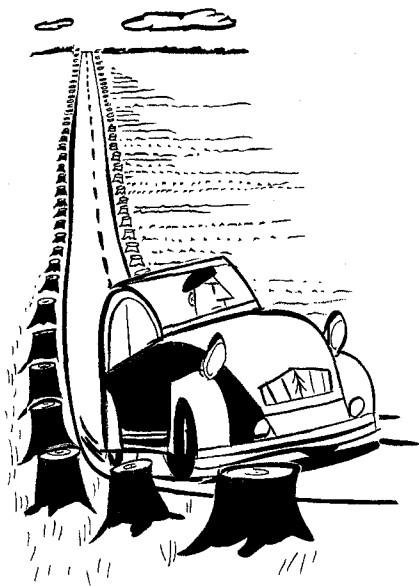
—Hendrik Hertzberg

PYRÉNÉES POSTCARD THE PLANE-TREE MASSACRE



In "The Unquiet Grave," Cyril Connolly, the thinking person's hedonist, described the particular thrill of driving south through France: "Peeling off the kilometres to the tune of 'Blue Skies,' sizzling down the long black liquid reaches of the Nationale Sept, the plane trees going sha-sha-sha through the open window, the windscreen yellowing with crushed midges, she with the Michelin

beside me, a handkerchief binding her hair..." Some may claim—perhaps because they are driving more slowly—that the trees actually make a softer sound, more *schwaa-schwaa* than *sha-sha*. But any argument about the correct onomatopoeia may soon become historical. The greater argument is about whether or not the trees should even be allowed to



exist anymore. Jean Glavany, the French Minister of Agriculture, whose concern evidently does not extend to silviculture, has just declared that "plane trees lining the roads amount to a public danger," and that they should all be cut down.

This is a shocking and, on the face of it, un-French attitude. The *arbres d'alignement* are an emblematic part of the French heritage: the fat trunks with bark like peeling distemper, the carefully sculpted and pollarded crowns, the leafy canopy arching high above the central road marking. A further part of the heritage is the traditional right of drivers to aim their cars into these unforgiving boles without any provocation on the part of the trees. The killer plane trees' most famous victim was Albert Camus, on his way north to Paris in 1960 with Michel Gallimard, whose Facel-Vega HK 500 attacked first one, then another tree on the Route Nationale Cinq near Sens. (Facel-Vega ceased making cars four years later.) In 1999, a government road-safety report concluded that "lateral obstacles"—most of which happen to be trees—are involved in thirty-eight per cent of fatal traffic accidents in France.

It's certainly true that France has the

best roads and the worst drivers in Western Europe. Portugal and Greece may kill a higher percentage of their motor-ing populations, but they have the excuse of lower-quality highways. The French are also European leaders when it comes to direct action. The Minister's death threat came as a response to an incident in the Hautes-Pyrénées. A motorcyclist died after colliding with a tree, where-upon a demonstration by grieving *motards* turned into a revenge mission: the chain saws came out, and a hundred plane trees, ninety-nine of them guilty by association, were levelled. M. Glavany, whose constituency happens to be in the Hautes-Pyrénées, sided with his potential voters. Not since Reagan blamed the forests for air pollution have trees received such high-level political condemnation.

By the end of the nineteenth century, France had as many as three million *arbres d'alignement*; now there are perhaps two hundred and fifty thousand. To those who defend them, the argument is based on rural tradition and, simply, beauty: the tree-lined alleys have the splendor of cathedral naves, with the light slanting in through the vertical slit windows. To solipsistic motorists, they are lateral obstacles, and the quick play of sun and shade disturbs those who invoke their civic right to drive faster than reason suggests. To the Minister, a tree is only a tree, and head count is all that matters: "For me, this is no time for hesitation. If we cut down all these trees, we can always plant the same number somewhere else." The notion of denuding the highways and replanting on harmless empty lots is dismissed by one protester—in a phrase only the French could invent—as "vegetal cicatrization."

One category of trees has at least escaped ministerial censure: the planes and poplars that for centuries have been planted along the towpaths of canals. In the future, those seeking the Connolly effect may be forced to do so by water, though whether the trees would make the proper *sha-sha* is dubious. And all it would take would be a drunken barge-man half blinded by the changing light, or a couple of speeding motorboats failing to negotiate a tree-lined bend, for M. Glavany and his *motard* chums to be out again with their chain saws.

—Julian Barnes

EXPIRED TRUST PAYING CLINTON'S BILLS



Two weeks ago, on a Friday afternoon, the offices of the Clinton Legal Expense Trust—the fund-raising juggernaut established to pay off the considerable legal bills of the former President and First Lady—quietly closed. Established in February, 1998, just after Hillary Clinton identified a “vast right-wing conspiracy,” the trust was headquartered in a nondescript seventh-floor office on Vermont Avenue, in Washington, D.C., high above the display window of Al’s Magic Shop, where rubber masks of George W. Bush have replaced the masks of Bill Clinton. The trust’s passing went virtually unnoticed. No one from the neighboring offices—a Chinese acupuncturist on one side, a diabetic-supply firm on the other—dropped by to say farewell. It’s unlikely that they even knew who worked there. The Clinton trust wasn’t listed on the lobby registry, and the shingle outside the office remained blank for the whole of the trust’s existence.

The anonymity was intentional. “It’s to ward off the right-wing loonies,” Christopher Healy, the trust’s sole employee, said the other day as he stepped over a workman named Smitty, who was disassembling Healy’s prefabricated oak desk, a rental from a local office-furniture company. “When I registered our Web site, clintontrust.com, I used my real name and my personal E-mail account,” Healy said. Within hours, the information appeared on the conservative Web forum FreeRepublic.com, and the Clinton-hating E-mail started pouring in. The anonymity also discouraged spontaneous visits from shady donors. “At the last trust,” Healy said, referring to an earlier incarnation of the Clinton defense fund, “Charlie Trie showed up at the office with a bag of money and plopped it down on the desk.”

Despite its humble circumstances, the trust raised a great deal for the Clintons—\$8,760,620.19, at last count. Even after expenses, that covered much of the eleven or twelve million dollars in legal fees that the Clintons have incurred

so far. The trust received more than a hundred and sixteen thousand contributions, the bulk of them through direct-mail marketing. The average donation was just seventy-five dollars, and the maximum ten thousand dollars (contributed by Denise Rich and her daughter Daniella, among others).

By the time of the Marc Rich pardon, the trust had stopped soliciting donations. At that point, many Clinton supporters may have been struggling to reconcile the Clintons’ supposedly crushing legal debt with Hillary’s eight-million-dollar book deal and the couple’s new homes in Washington and Chappaqua. At the height of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, in 1998, the trust was bringing in as much as two hundred and twenty-two thousand dollars a day; last month, a hundred dollars was considered a good haul. The trust, though still technically solvent, was no longer generating enough to justify the office’s nine-hundred-dollar monthly rent.

Now the office was practically empty. The day before, U.P.S. had carted away a hundred and sixty boxes of records bound for the Presidential library, in Arkansas. The phone rang, and Healy stooped to answer it—Smitty was carting away his desk. Smitty was thrilled to learn that the office he’d just cleared out had been used to raise money to pay the former President’s legal bills, but it puzzled him that the Clintons were still four million dollars

short. It seemed like a lot. Then Smitty looked down at the rental receipt he was holding. “Well, I’m not surprised,” he said. “For what they paid to rent this stuff, they could have owned it four times over.”

—Joshua Green

HIGHWAY BEAUTIFICATION THE F.D.R. DRIVE GUY



On a recent Wednesday morning, Otis Houston, Jr., was at his post under the Triborough Bridge, on an empty span of asphalt just off the southbound lanes of the F.D.R. Drive. He was sitting in a yellow school chair by a coffee table, upon which he’d arranged a bunch of bananas and a red rose in a white vase. Cars were racing by at a rate of about sixty a minute. Now and then, one slowed, and the driver honked and waved at Houston, who waved back with a toilet brush he had found on the street that morning.

For four years, in this spot beneath the bridge, Houston has been putting together makeshift displays and performing unusual calisthenics for the benefit of millions of drivers on the F.D.R. Recent exhibits have included



“Can I get that to go?”

four blue strollers upside down in a puddle, twenty-three bottles of juice in a row, and a white stuffed carnival gorilla in a beach chair. Morning commuters are regularly treated to the sight of Houston exercising. "Health is one of my main subjects," he said. "People are stuck in their cars, and I like to show them that there's another way to be." To demonstrate, he got up and started shadow-boxing, which earned a honk and a wave from the driver of a red ambulette.

Houston, who is forty-seven years old, was wearing jeans and a New York City Housing Authority T-shirt and a pair of New Balance running shoes. He had shaved a few days earlier, and an even stubble ran from his chin all the way around the top of his head. After a few moments, he let out a howl and sat back down. "I also do a lot of stretching," he said. "There's eight thousand poses in yoga, and I've invented a few extra ones myself. And there's no reason not to do them in your car. Look, I can do them right here in my chair." He spread his legs and touched his toes. A man riding by on a BMW motorcycle honked and gave him the thumbs-up.

Sometimes Houston's work relates to current events, particularly tragedies. After the Columbine shootings, he laid fifteen yellow tulips, one for each person killed, on a plank supported by paving stones. When the New York City police officer John Kelly died last year while chasing a man on a motorcycle, Houston found a print of Jesus and framed it with a motorcycle tire.

Houston came to New York from Greenville, South Carolina, in 1970 and spent 1976 in jail for dealing cocaine. A few years later, he was shot twice in the back. In 1984, he returned to prison (heroin this time), where he read books like William Barrett's "Irrational Man," took Art 101, and became a vegetarian. He was released in 1992 and worked for a while at King Charles Meat Warehouse, in the Bronx. "It's all part of the experience," he said.

A blue Taurus pulled onto the curb, and an older man got out. He was wearing glasses and a pink shirt and preferred not to give his name, because he was supposed to be inspecting something for the city, not chatting with people under the Triborough Bridge.

"Are you the one who leaves out

those wonderful displays?" he asked.

"Yes, I am!"

"Are they for sale?"

"No, but you can have them."

"Well, I drive by twice a week for my work, and I just love them. I wanted to give you a little something."

The man handed Houston a few crumpled bills and hurried away.

"That's part of the experience, too," Houston said.

—Bryant Urstadt

OVERACTING DEPT. ERIN BROCKOVICH'S BOSS



Albert Finney was nominated for an Academy Award earlier this year for his portrayal of the crusading litigator Ed Masry in the movie "Erin Brockovich." Since then, Masry has been honing his own performance—impersonating Albert Finney impersonating Ed Masry. One recent evening, near streets named Oakwood and Oakleaf and shopping centers called Clear Oaks and Oakbrook Plaza, Masry was slumped in his seat on the left side of a dais that supported the five-member city council of Thousand Oaks, California. The council meeting was two and a half hours old, and Masry looked nearly catatonic. He stared over a pair of aviator glasses as a procession of full-bosomed women and potbellied men lectured him on the evils of an ordinance restricting the right to park recreational vehicles on the street.

"A 'balanced life' does not mean more government intrusion, Mr. Masry," an R.V. supporter said, citing a founding principle of Thousand Oaks, a planned community an hour northwest of Los Angeles. More worn down than won over, the five council members put the measure aside for further study.

When it came time to go on the attack, Masry snapped out of his stupor. The target, this time, was real-estate developers, rather than Pacific Gas and Electric, as it was in "Erin Brockovich." Masry's mission is to keep builders from turning Thousand Oaks into a concrete jungle, as he believes they did to the San Fernando Valley, where he grew up.

"Thousand Oaks is basically controlled by developers, and that's the bottom line," he says.

Masry was elected last fall, when an anti-development activist named Linda Parks talked him into joining her reelection bid. He spent almost two hundred thousand dollars of his own money on the campaign. He and Parks swept the two available seats and quickly began to reprise the sort of act—she leads, he comes thundering behind—that turned Masry and Brockovich into Hollywood commodities. They've since kept the city in a fairly constant uproar.

A few months ago, Masry caused a commotion when he denounced as "developers' whores" the citizens who had spoken before the council in support of easing certain building restrictions. Charles Cohen, an attorney who works for local developers, wrote him a furious letter demanding an apology to the "California Lutheran University presidents, community volunteers, Little League coaches," and at least one nun who, Cohen believed, had been lumped under the phrase. Masry was undeterred. "Chuck Cohen saying Ed Masry is a bad guy is like Charlie Manson and Tim McVeigh, along with Hitler and Genghis Khan, saying Ed Masry is a bad guy," he said. At another memorable council meeting, Cohen shouted, "Mr. Masry... you're no Albert Finney!"

The issue up for debate the other day was whether Thousand Oaks should approve and help fund part of a big development scheme involving fifty "affordable" homes. Masry was against it. He leaned into the challenge, more Charles Laughton than Albert Finney. "First, we've got to put the cart before the horse," he said, savoring the mangled phrase. How could the city spend money to help the developers, he asked, when it didn't know what they intended to build? "We don't know if we've got a square hole or a round hole," he said, his voice booming. "If we're leaving it to the developers... we're going to get fifty *dos-ets* somewhere in a *wash*."

On and on he went. Then it was time for a vote. The developers' funding was approved three-to-two, with Masry and Parks in dissent. The council moved on to a discussion of golf-course fees, and Masry started to drift off again.

—Michael Cieply

THE FINANCIAL PAGE WHAT WEATHER COSTS

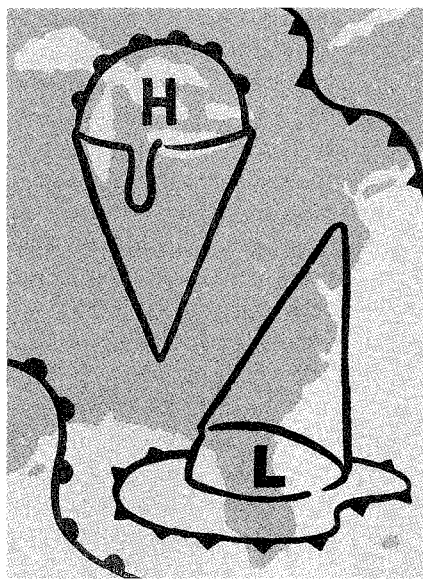
Americans love ice cream. Every year, the average American eats twenty-three quarts of it, four times more than the average Frenchman. But that love is not unconditional; it waxes and wanes with the weather. A few cool weeks in the middle of summer, and ice-cream sales plummet. In this year's annual letter to shareholders, both the chairman and the president of Friendly's blamed the company's disappointing performance on "unseasonably cool weather in the Northeast." CoolBrands—the makers of Eskimo Pie and Bresler's ice cream—attributed a sales slump last summer and fall to the same chilly stretch. "We cannot influence the weather," the executives from Friendly's wrote.

That seems reasonable enough. But there are many things people can't influence that they can nonetheless protect themselves against. Farmers planting wheat today can't control what its price will be months hence, so in order to secure a profit they sell the wheat in advance. Homeowners can't control the course of storms, so they buy insurance. Likewise, the people at Friendly's couldn't control the temperature last summer, but they could have influenced the impact it had on them, if only they'd picked up what Wall Street calls a "weather derivative."

Weather derivatives are the basic tools for managing the risks that weather poses to businesses. Invented in 1997, they come in complex forms and have trading-desk names—swaptions, costless collars, strangles, straddles—but what they do is quite simple. Ski resorts buy them to protect against low snowfall (a resort might recover, say, five thousand dollars for every inch that the season's snowfall is short of the annual average). Gas companies use them to hedge against mild winters. Corney & Barrow, a British wine-bar chain that specializes in outdoor dining, used them last summer to insure that a run of rainy days wouldn't hit its business too hard.

If the theory is simple, the practice is hard. Companies that actually make a business of trading weather deriva-

tives—such as Enron or Aquila—have to turn weather into a commodity. To begin with, Enron has to come up with a reasonable long-range forecast, calculating the odds of a balmy summer. Then it has to set the right price, determining, for example, how much a summer that's two degrees cooler than normal will cost an ice-cream maker in Texas. Enron is not an insurance company; it prefers not to carry all the risks of the policies it sells. It's more like a bookie. For every ice-cream maker looking to protect itself against a cool summer, Enron tries to find someone who's eager to be protected against a hot one (Twinings tea, perhaps?). If the weather-derivatives market were perfect, all these



bets would match, and there would be no risk.

This perfect market is still a glint in Enron's eye. Since its inception, four years ago, the weather-derivatives trade has grown to \$7.5 billion. But that's only a tiny share of the estimated one-trillion-dollar segment of the U.S. economy that's vulnerable to bad weather. For the market to be truly efficient, it needs a lot of players. But most companies are like Friendly's. They see the weather as something to be endured rather than managed.

You might say that economic history is the history of people learning to manage risk. Things that once seemed utterly unpredictable (the harvest, the ocean winds, the flow of capital) were recog-

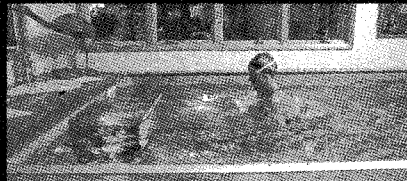
nized as being subject to the laws of probability and could therefore be forecast with some degree of certainty. In fact, probability itself had to be invented. As Peter L. Bernstein explains in his history of risk, "Against the Gods," the Greeks understood that more things could happen than do happen, but they never calculated the odds that any one thing might happen. They played dice with four-sided bones called astragali, which had two narrow faces and two wide faces. Although the chances were better that the die would land on one of the wide faces, the payoff was the same either way. Risk didn't become quantifiable until the Renaissance, ushering in such innovations as actuarial tables, long-term business forecasts, and true gambling odds. In time, insurance became integral to consumer society.

It's only in the last fifty years, however, that risk management has really flourished. Companies now routinely protect themselves against fluctuations in interest rates, in the value of foreign currencies, and in the prices of raw materials. That way, they can concentrate on their core business. If you make shoes in Mexico, why gamble on the price of the peso? Hedge that risk, and focus on the shoes. What's more, investors love predictability. They don't want to hear bad numbers blamed on the rain. So, even though much of corporate America may still think weather derivatives are Wall Street-geek hocuspocus, someday they'll seem as indispensable as the insurance on your black Mercedes S.U.V.

In 1953, the Nobel Prize-winning economist Kenneth J. Arrow came up with the idea of what he called "the complete market." He envisioned a world in which every potential outcome could be given a price tag—scenarios would be like commodities. If you wanted to start a software business, but were worried that Microsoft might put out software similar to yours, you could quantify that possibility and insure against it. In this complete market, Arrow believed, people would be freer to take chances, because they wouldn't have to fear being blindsided by things they couldn't control. Today the weather, tomorrow the world.

—James Surowiecki

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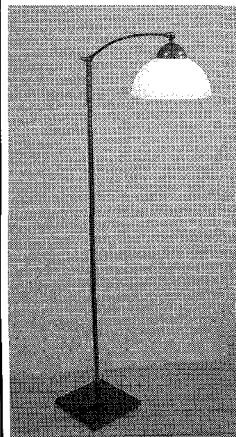
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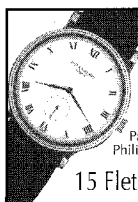
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NEW YORK JOURNAL

THE NAKED CITY

The New Burlesque versus the old smut.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

Probably the bluntest but most densely coded sign in New York right now can be found on the front of the Show World theatre and pornography emporium, on Eighth Avenue, between Forty-second and Forty-third Streets. It is a handwritten sign, taped to the street façade, and reads simply, "NO LIVE GIRLS." In one sense, it is just a way of alerting passersby, or, for that matter, inquisitive policemen, that Show World, in accordance with Mayor Giuliani's New Rules, is no longer in the strip-show business. The New Rules, brought in by the Mayor three years ago, and aimed at giving the business to topless bars and strip clubs—at least, in the parts of town that the Mayor wanted to give over to business—dictate that only forty per cent of a bookstore or a cabaret can be devoted to X-rated material. Now the upstairs lounge of Show World, where live girls were once lively, has become a small Off-Off Broadway theatre, with short-story readings and tryouts of new plays and even a production of "Measure for Measure." The explicit point of the sign is that there are no live girls in the vicinity, but its handwritten, hand-taped nature also seems to imply both coercion and temporariness. The sign has the force not of a permanent injunction—"No Parking"—but of a momentary disappearance: "Gone Fishin'." The real meaning of the sign is that there once were live girls there, and there ought to be live girls there again, but, somehow, just now, there aren't.

What is thriving in New York in the absence of the old smut is something that is often called the New Burlesque. The New Burlesque is a strange, late-night movement in which live girls take their clothes off for not much money, in a spirit that seems to be a generational marker: extreme unself-consciousness about sex, joined to extreme self-consciousness about everything else. It is organized by a community of desperately sincere young people who

find in the old arts of inhibition and titillation a sexual authenticity that mere candor no longer affords. The New Burlesque combines elements of downtown art and uptown stripping—or, according to certain skeptics, the tawdriness of topless dancing with the tedium of performance art.

In some measure, the New Burlesque is a way of ushering the old erotic theatre out of the straw and stick houses of pornography and into the little brick house of downtown art, which, huff and puff as he will, the Mayor cannot blow down. (This is because the drafty holes in the downtown brick house are stuffed with the Arts & Leisure section of the *Times*.) Its sites include the Va Va Voom Room, on Lafayette Street; the Blue Angel Exotic Cabaret, on West Twenty-fourth Street; and the Slipper Room, on Orchard Street. A typical Saturday night at the Va Va Voom Room—"Your den of iniquity for vaudeville and burlesque"—begins with a terrific Basie-style swing band of sax, piano, and drums. Then there is a series of acts. There may be a comic, say, or a Cab Calloway impersonator; there may be a pseudo-French chanteuse singing Piaf songs; and then there will be burlesque strippers, impersonating burlesque strippers. Miss Bunny Love may come out holding a cake, dressed as a nineteen-fifties housewife, in crinoline and pearls, and then, in *extase* at the sheer Betty Crockerness of it all, take off her dress and underskirt, and spray her body and breasts with whipped cream and icing. It is a joke about the absurdity of fifties motherhood; it is a joke about the absurdity of "subverting" that absurdity by spraying whipped cream on your body, à la Karen Finley; and it is a way of actually doing it at the same time.

A typical Saturday-night lineup at the Blue Angel, similarly, might include Miss Bonnie Dun, a stately, slow-moving fan-dancer of the Sally Rand school, followed by an "edgy" performance artist

who pretends to mutilate herself; a second dancer, who begins dressed as a nun, though she does not end that way; and a nicely augmented girl who progresses from raincoat to black thong, of the kind one might expect to see in a windowless one-story building with violet neon lettering in an industrial suburb of Atlanta. There is always, in the New Burlesque, what the professors would call a metaphor of the exotic: the Blue Angel is run by Ute, who has a German accent, and the Va Va Voom Room by Miss Astrid, who pretends to have one. The performance takes place behind a hedge of camp, irony, pastiche, historical reference, and star-shaped pasties.

Nonetheless, the essence of the act involves women wearing clothes and then not wearing clothes. The New Burlesque is a joke about stripping in which the punch line is stripping, like a joke about a doctor which ends with a prescription. The joke is on the male gaze, and still the males gaze. As a consequence, this means that the New Burlesque can coexist quite happily with the old smut. At the Blue Angel, for instance, Ute, who challenges the audience to consider their own spectatorship, is joined by a co-host named Dominick, a Howard Stern-style comic who rages at the Mayor for making it tough for "a guy to find a place where he can drink a beer and look at some titties." The doubleness creates an odd netherworld of meaning. The girls in the Va Va Voom Room are pretending to be live girls, and the audience is pretending to be a burlesque audience. But the performers do all the things that live girls do—taking off their clothes to music while writhing in pasties and thong—and the audience does all the things that burlesque audiences once did, hooting and applauding as the dancers dance, so that in the end it isn't clear how the pretense is different from the actual thing. One has to read the entire book from beginning to end to be reminded that there are inverted commas embossed on both covers.

A typical figure of the New Burlesque is the comedian Trav S. D. ("Trav S. D.—trav-es-ty," he explains. "You see?") Travis, as burlesque comics have so often been, is both a funding officer at the New-York Historical Society, where he spends his days beseeching foundations



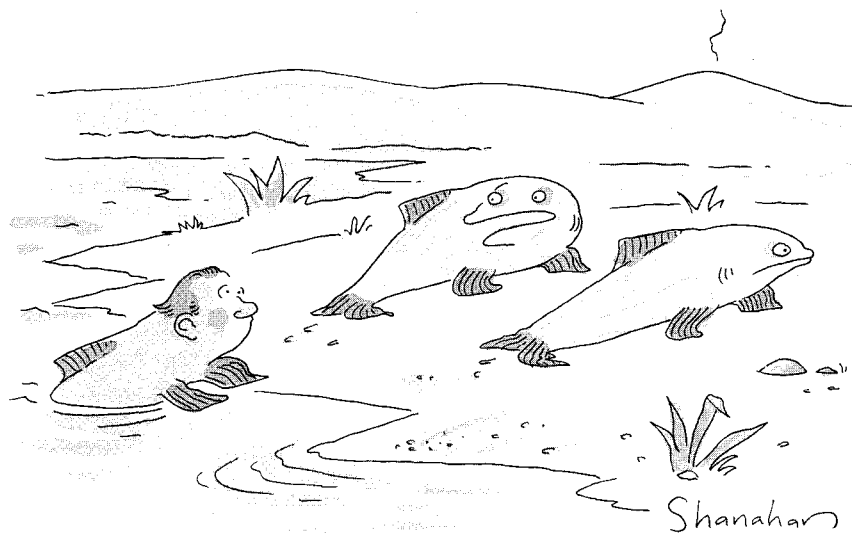
In the New Burlesque, sex is sheltered behind camp, irony, pastiche, and pasties.

for grants to dust off the Tiffany lamps, and a hardworking, upwardly mobile top banana. He is also a playwright, a poet, an actor, the director of the Mountebanks theatre company, and an occasional contributor to the libertarian magazine *Reason*. He is thirty-five, is married to a woman named Susie, and is the devoted father of Cashel and Charlie. He has on tap both the narrow-eyed, "What the hey!" leer of a professional burlesque comic and the wide-eyed sincere look of someone who, as a teen-ager, was voted the funniest man in Rhode Island. Wherever he goes in New York, on fund-raising or whoopee-cushion business, he wears a Stubby Kaye porkpie hat, to indicate his true vocation.

Travis is a scholar of burlesque. His own act, which he will soon perform at a burlesque theatre on Coney Island, is an erudite evocation of the sonorous, ornate monologues of W. C. Fields or

Fred Allen. "Ladies and gentlemen, that which you are about to see may disturb you," he begins one routine. "I have here photographic representations of the most heinous collection of freakish human aberrations ever to step on God's footstool: my old girlfriends. Those of you with a weak heart may want to step out onto Surf Avenue for a smoke." The "girlfriends," whom he shows in ancient slides of Barnum's freaks, include A'a and Pahoehe, the famous bearded Hawaiian sisters. "Boy, could those girls hula. And they didn't even need a grass skirt."

On a recent Thursday evening, Travis had put on a straw boater and a blazer, adding a note of Ring Lardner wisecracks to his normal appearance, and gone out to pursue both of his vocations. He was wearing the straw hat because the New-York Historical Society was having at its headquarters a Prohibition Ball to raise funds. Travis looked right at home: "It's



"Trust me—you're more than ready."

good, really, because I bought the boater for this ball, but I can also use it in my work." He made sure that the guests, particularly potential funders, were happy and had drinks in their hands, and settled down to talk. He took a table, appropriately enough, within a few feet of one of the society's many underappreciated treasures: John Vanderlyn's "Ariadne Asleep on the Island of Naxos," the early-nineteenth-century female nude with strategic drapery. An "Ariadne Asleep" created one of the first great scandals in the city about how much could be shown and with how little drapery.

"I suppose the New Burlesque grew out of the New Vaudeville," Travis said, scrunching his brow. "But the New Vaudeville was basically warm, fuzzy baby boomers, and this is something else. The New Burlesque, at least the local version, sprang out of grunge culture. It was very much allied to tattoo and piercing. And then, somehow, people started exploring burlesque in that same spirit. My own involvement came through my time with the Bindlestiff Family Cirkus, which pioneered explicit sexual circus performance. They had their famous flaming-fellatio act, although, weirdly, it's the man who eats the torch that the woman is wearing, a strap-on dildo that's on fire.

"In some ways, it was an intermarriage of postmodern feminism and grunge culture," Travis went on to say. "A lot of it is done in a Camille Paglia spirit—women's sexuality as empower-

ing, not demeaning, that kind of surprising stagecraft and desire to take apart traditional forms of sexual role playing. I found it incredibly moving at the Blue Angel the other night, when the young burlesque artist came out dressed as a nun, and then took her cassock off, and flung her ta-tas around."

Travis rubbed sleep from his eyes. "I am tired," he said. "Cashel, our oldest, is up early, and he's a kicker in bed." He laughed ruefully. "But I'm looking forward to tonight's show, particularly, because the World Famous Bob is a favorite of mine. It's surreal. I feel that I'm seesawing between two lives. But it offers very different kinds of happiness."

While the New Burlesque shines, the old smut falters. At ten-thirty on another recent week night, Al Goldstein, the sixty-five-year-old publisher and editor of *Screw*—a mangy lion in a New York City winter, pasty-white rather than golden, but a lion nonetheless—is changing his pants and is about to go onstage. He is upstairs, at the "cabaret" at the old Studio 54, sitting with an entourage in a small clump of deep sofas a few feet from the raised stage, waiting to put on his one-man show. Slowly, carefully, he unwraps the tinfoil from a vast salami and experimentally places the salami inside his pants. Then he takes it back out. The sticker on the salami reads "Katz's Delicatessen." Tonight, he is opening for Ron Jeremy, a star of pornographic

films, whose act is based in part on his capacity for auto-fellatio. The Katz's salami is there as a way of kidding Ron.

"He's really sweet," a pretty blond woman was saying of Goldstein. "His face in repose is so sad."

"I've been to the Supreme Court before, but I never got cert," Goldstein was saying to a friend at the same time. He has an old-fashioned New York accent, husky and complaining.

Fifteen minutes before, outside on the street, working a cheerful line of people waiting to see him perform, Goldstein had been teasing the blond woman and her husband, a lawyer who works with him from time to time, about oral sex: how much and how often. Goldstein always teases people about oral sex on first meeting, as a form of avuncular hazing; you should have such an uncle. "You look like a nun," he had begun, and went on from there. But the woman seemed unperturbed, even flattered, by the public attention. "There's something sweet about him," she insisted.

These are difficult times for Al Goldstein. He recently described himself as a "sad, overweight, diabetic, financially ruined sixty-five-year-old Jew with a dwindling list of friends and a nearly dried-up sex drive." He is involved in a dispute with a former assistant, who claims that he harassed her with threatening messages. A few weeks ago, Goldstein came back from his house in Florida to surrender to the police, and spent a day in jail. He maintains that the messages were innocuous and were protected by the First Amendment. It is his twentieth arrest; the previous nineteen were on obscenity charges. Long ago, he won a famous case allowing him to impute a sex life to the Pillsbury Doughboy.

"I'm going to take this case all the way up," Goldstein said. "Maybe my son will be out of Harvard Law by then. He'll be able to defend me. Wouldn't that be wonderful?" Goldstein's son goes to Harvard Law School, and Goldstein is so proud of this that he talks about it all the time.

On the stage, a fortyish woman with dark hair and pale skin has tied a black man to a chair, placed a red ball gag in his mouth, and is beating him on the chest with a plaited whip. The crowd, mostly made up of what looks like frat boys and their dates, watches wholesomely. After a while, the woman stops and unties the

man, gently removing the ball from his mouth. He stands up, and they both lean forward and exchange short, quick, head-nodding laughter, like two politicians meeting between the rostrums after a debate. Goldstein is the next act up.

Sooner or later, anyone out on an extreme edge is called either “surprisingly liberal” (said of Islamic clerics and Texas congressmen) or “essentially conservative” (said of pornographers and avant-garde artists). This is because a Burroughs or a Bukowski must be more conservative than you think, and those congressmen more liberal, to live in the world at all. Al Goldstein, in this scheme, is essentially conservative, even old-fashioned. He is the last apostle of the creed—which in the sixties and seventies tied Lenny Bruce, Kenneth Tynan, and Hugh Hefner into an improbable knot—that what is necessary to human liberation is the defeat of “inhibitions,” and that this can be achieved if the basic acts of human beings as reproducing vertebrates are talked about very, very freely, and the basic apparatus shown very, very clearly.

“I’m a dinosaur!” Goldstein admits later. “The world has changed. The battle’s been won! No live girls, because who wants them? How can you be excited seeing anything? Oh, I should be in Madame Tussaud’s. I’m a living wax figurine. I’m a *dinosaur*! I’m waiting for Spielberg to make a movie about me. ‘Pornographer’s Park!’ My voyeurism now isn’t topless clubs. It’s Court TV and C-SPAN, it’s ‘Booknotes’ with Brian Lamb! My highest ambition now is to be a Supreme Court precedent. It’s my legacy to my son, who’s in Harvard Law. Otherwise, I have no purpose. You know T. S. Eliot? I am the hollow man, I am the stuffed man now.

“Giuliani hasn’t won. It’s *boredom* that’s won, that’s all! The New Burlesque? It’s nostalgia, is all it is. I understand it. Listen, I still masturbate to Betty Page—I’m looking for the inside of her thigh. But it’s nostalgia. People are bored with the excess. Plato’s Retreat—what a nightmare that was. I might get married again just to not have sex anymore. The thought of going to a topless club—I would rather fucking die. But I’m happy with my hollow life. I said to my son, ‘Next time I’m in court, you’ll be at the defense table!’ He said, ‘No, Dad—I’ll be at the prosecution table.’ Then he gives me that wry look.”

At Studio 54, Goldstein receives nervous, polite laughter for his standup, a sort of deliberately cruddy Seinfeld (“I wonder, Would you wash your balls if you didn’t have a date that night?”), and nervous, polite applause when he leaves the stage. Ron Jeremy’s act is the draw, and most of the crowd is there to see him.

“Did they laugh?” Goldstein asks his friends when he sits down, and then lights a cigar about the same size as the salami.

Eleven-thirty at the Blue La La show at the Slipper Room, around the corner from where our immigrant fathers sold and sweated. The Slipper Room is owned by a young couple named Camille and James, who renovated it and installed a perfect bijou stage, and they have struggled hard to keep it both gay and straight, as a young couple with a jazz bar in the thirties might have struggled to keep their little place integrated. He has Ken Burns bangs and a warm smile; she is blond and went to Franklin & Marshall, a liberal-arts school in Pennsylvania. They are the kind of charming, sincere young couple who in another city would have opened the one independent bookstore with a Beat section, or the one coffee bar not actually a Starbucks. In New York now, they have the Slipper Room, and

they put on their own New Burlesque revue on Saturday nights: “The show that looks like your dad’s old *Playboys*, plays like your bachelor uncle’s vinyl, and grooves like a cool, neat gimlet.” James emcees, and Camille dances topless.

Tonight’s Blue La La show (“A Peek Into the French Art of Seduction . . .”) begins with a recording of Blossom Dearie’s version of Cole Porter’s “Give Him the Oo-La-La.” Then the World Famous Bob, a hefty, pneumatic blonde with a Betty Boop voice, comes out dressed in a French maid’s outfit, and she and a pneumatic partner, Julie Atlas Muz, do a pastiche of a French stag film of the twenties—a maid and her mistress simpering and undressing. Then comes a singer who sounds like someone who once knew someone who once talked to someone who owned a record by Frank Sinatra, Jr. Then Meryl (Lady) Finger, in a black-and-red lace Spanish gown, belts out a thirties-style double-entendre song (“Everybody’s Girl”); Blue Canary does a harmonica and tap-dancing act; Dr. Ducky Doolittle does a “lecture” along the lines of what used to be called a “party record.” (“I’m a great fan of hers,” Travis says, professionally, of Dr. Ducky. “She has another promising character, too: Knockers the Clown!”) Finally, Julie



“I totally agree with you about capitalism, neo-colonialism, and globalization, but you really come down too hard on shopping.”

Atlas Muz comes back out and does a curtain-humping Newark burlesque—a strip number to “savage” recorded music.

Some of it is parody, some pastiche, and some provocation. The members of the audience are mostly in their twenties, and seem to switch modes on a dime with the performers. At any moment, what defines a generation is knowing what's straight and what's twisted in its art without its having to be explained. A child of the sixties knows, let's say, that “When I'm Sixty-four” might be taken as sincere, while “Within You, Without You” could be treated as a semi-joke song. Similarly in sexual manners: a child of the sixties also knows, say, that whereas bralessness was erotic only to *Playboy*, one could still thrill to Joni Mitchell's long straight hair. It is extremely hard for a generational outsider to the New Burlesque to figure out which parts are twisted, and which merely curved.

The World Famous Bob, for instance, is both. She has made the passage from performance art to burlesque dancing in a few, untroubled steps. “I had a performance-art piece that I did all over the world,” she says, after the show. “It was called ‘The World Famous Bob's Topless Aerobics in 6-Inch Heels While Eating Cheeseburgers to AC/DC.’ Which sort of describes it right there. I came here and I worked in gay bars, and then I crossed over into burlesque. For me, the difference between stripping and burlesque is that burlesque is an art form. It's like the difference between coin currency and paper money, you know? Burlesque is more abstract. It's an illusion of a character. You're inventing you.”

The distance between what the World Famous Bob does and mere topless dancing is obvious to Travis. Although his world has intersected the world of Al Goldstein—he, too, has shared a stage with Ron Jeremy—he sees the old and the new eroticism as entirely distinct. The New Burlesque “is more intelligent,” he maintains. “Like all art, it is about tension. Generally, the strip *ends* at the moment of nakedness—if it occurs at all—as opposed to being entirely about gratuitously waving breasts around like livestock at the county fair. In the old smut, instead of wearing costumes the girls wear a G-string. They have no enthusiasm. They just flop around, like waitresses, and clearly hate their jobs. One

gets the impression that they are sex slaves, presided over by cruel taskmasters, and they probably are. This is because it's only about money. In the New Burlesque, the money is sort of incidental; the performers are into making art.”

Where have all the live girls gone? Some have gone to Long Island City, across the river; more have been beamed up to the World Wide Web. In New York, we tend to give credit to the Mayor and the *Times* for what is in fact made by the layering of time. All cultures need symbolic images of naked women and excuses for looking at them. The excuses are the culture. (The really good excuses hang in museums, the lame ones used to hang around Times Square.) The success of *Maxim* or *Stuff* is, after all, also a triumph of another kind of New Burlesque. A naïf would assume that the readers of these magazines were desperate, panting for nude women, live girls, the whole enchilada, and would not easily imagine that *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, which do show it all, existed right beside them on the newsstand, and had once even been more “distinguished” and acceptable. The only desire greater than that of looking at women's bodies, it appears, is the desire not to be seen looking at women's bodies in the same magazines your father did.

A certain sleazy reticence, Monica flipping up her jacket to show her thong, is as much a part of the sexual code of our time as a certain fascinated candor was of a time gone by. It would seem that What Men Want now is not the friskiness of life but the poses of girlishness, no matter how obviously phony they may be. They want the artifice, more than the girls—the filigree and formality of paper money more than the clink of hard coin. Well, Vanderlyn's Ariadne wasn't a live girl, either. Men are always in search of *tableaux vivants*, living pictures—or, rather, pictured lives, girls made to pose. What makes the blood jump are things the mind already knows, and those things, it seems, must now be bound with enough pastiche, self-consciousness, and fake German accents to achieve their little end. As so often, the prohibition and the provocation turn out to share the same assumptions. In the New Burlesque, as in Mayor Giuliani's New York, there are different kinds of happiness, but no live girls. ♦

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INTERNATIONAL CABBY AWARDS ANNOUNCED

BY BRUCE MCCALL

Winners of the best in-taxi-safety and receipt-reminder messages of the year—the prestigious Cabbys—were announced today by the International Buckle-Up Bureau, in suburban Cleveland, Ohio.

Best production values: “What’s Up with Taking a Taxi, Dude?” Produced by the Greater Los Angeles Limousine and Valet-Parking Authority. Performed live at the Getty Museum, and featuring the many voices of Mr. Robin Williams. Musical score composed by Randy Newman and performed by the Santa Monica Pier Symphonia. Guest narrator: Ms. Jackie Collins. Forty-five seconds.

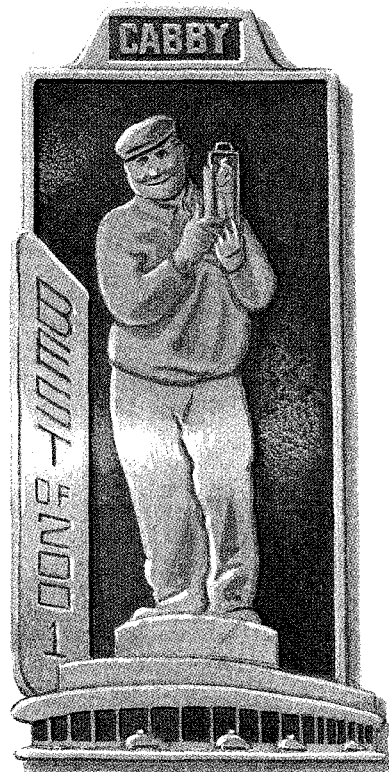
Best use of alternative technology: For the use of cans and string in “Bus-Loving Peoples Vow Death (to the Taxi-Snob Claque!).” Produced by the Prefecture of P’yongyang, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Producer: Kim Jong Il. Lead vocal: Kim Jong Il. Kazoo solo: Kim Jong Il. Mixing: Kim Jong Il. Kim Jong Il, composer. One hour forty-three seconds.

Easiest message to understand: “Attention! It Is Expressly Forbidden to Ride Without a Fastened Seat Belt in Taxis in Which It Is Forbidden to Ride Without a Fastened Seat Belt.” Produced by the Berlin District Office of Public Transport Works and the Directorate of Citizen-Safety Supervision of the Streets, Subways, Trolleys, and Waterways of the Federal Republic. Music adapted from Zutz’s “The March of the Prussian Babies.” Performed by the Autobus Drivers’ and Conductors’ Union Benevolent Society Volksband. Six minutes fifty-two seconds.

Best expression of civic spirit: “You Deserve a Good Strong Belt!” Produced by the City of San Francisco Taxi-Passenger Wellness Cooperative and the

Golden Gate Tots-in-Taxis Program. Performed by the Bolinas Silence-Is-Golden Mime Collective, in loving harmony with and respect for all moving things. Thirty-four minutes.

Most creative concept: “We Have Sold All the Seat Belts to Buy Medicine, and the Taxis, Too (Song of the



Baghdad Taxi Guard).” Conceived and produced by the Emergency Council for the Greater Baghdad Mobile Defense Corps. Four minutes thirty-five seconds.

Catchiest text or lyrics in a traditional form: “Viva Los Seat Belts! (Ain’t Gonna Gamble My Ass).” Produced by the Las Vegas Chamber of Visitor Satisfaction, Honorary Chairman Steve Wynn, Chairman Kirk Kerkorian. Musical theme composed, arranged, and conducted by Don King and recorded live at the Bugsy Siegel Convention

Center by the World Boxing Association Glee Club. Two minutes twenty-three seconds.

Catchiest text or lyrics in a nontraditional form: “Rappin’ (All the Way to the F----- Morgue!).” Produced and performed by Big Fat Ten-Ton Hog and the Toxic Anarchy Krue for the Civic Uplift Committee of the Coral Gables Junior League. Fifty-three minutes.

Best alternative script: For the use of haiku in “The Taxi Weeps.” “To see the seat belt / Lying like a dead serpent / Are your marbles gone?” Produced by the Tokyo Traffic Serenity Council. Performed by the Toyota Motor Corporation Upholstery Shop Kabuki Little Theatre. Fifty-six seconds.

Best sound effects: “One Shan’t Get to Ascot Whilst One’s Dead!” Produced by the Greater London Steam Traction and Horse-Drawn Hansom Council. Car-crash effects by the Royal Driving Academy. Fifty-two seconds.

Best dramatic performance by an ensemble cast: “France Is Seat Belts, Seat Belts Are France.” Produced by the Paris Institute for Motorized Culture, in association with the Academy of the Philosophy of Collision. The Fool: Jean-Pierre Léaud. The Hour: Juliette Binoche. The Périphérique: Fanny Ardant. Eternal Pain: Gérard Depardieu. Sixty-eight seconds (approx.).

Best use of indigenous imagery: “Go Ahead—Be a Brazil Nut!” Produced by the São Paulo Urban Hospital Association for the São Paulo District Taxi Council. Nut-cracking sound effects by the Hot Club of the Alciente Amazon Tribe, without permission, mixed and mastered at Sound Off Studios, Nashville, Tennessee. One minute.

Others. Loudest performance: Melbourne (Australia) Taxi Council, “Seat Belts Are for Sheilas.” Shortest message: Tijuana Independent Taxi & Limousine Operators, “They Never Passed the Law” (driver-recited). Most effective promotion for use of public transportation: New York City Taxi & Limousine Commission, “Various Third-Tier Celebrities.” ♦

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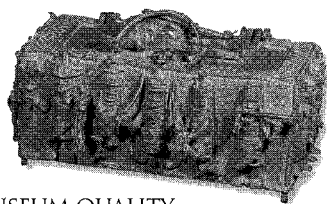
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LIFE AND LETTERS

THE KAFKA CONNECTION

A displaced writer revisits a haunted city of his youth.

BY AHARON APPELFELD

I visited Prague in 1938, when I was six. Even then, the horror of what was to come dwelled everywhere, but my parents and I were still free, we still travelled in first class, and my mother had promised to buy me an electric train when we arrived. I remember the sleeping car that we boarded—the scent of the soap in the bathroom, the narrow, elongated beds—and the pleasant dusk of May.

Every summer, we visited one of the cities that encircled my childhood—Vienna, Prague, Budapest. My birthplace, Czernowitz, had belonged to the Hapsburg Empire, and, in many ways, it was like its more famous sisters, only smaller and less distinguished. The preparations for these journeys were important events. In the days before the departure, I was too excited to fall asleep at night. Mother sat at my side for hours, hoping to distract me with stories, promising me trips and presents. Exhausted, I fell into a restless sleep and woke up early in the morning, waiting for our housekeeper, Victoria. A short, stout woman, she came from a Carpathian village and used a picturesque, coarsely amusing language that was different from the way we spoke. She was the village inside the city.

This is what I remember from that visit to Prague: holding my mother's right hand while my father, beset by worries, walked several paces ahead of us. The narrow streets of the Old Town were very crowded, and I had the uncomfortable feeling that if we didn't hurry we would lose him in the throng. Mother tried desperately to find a store that had an electric train; she nearly drove Father mad. I remember him shouting, "That's exactly what we need right now!"

In my imagination, Vienna, Prague, and Budapest blend into a single marvel. Because the trip to Prague was the last one that I ever made with my par-

ents, I have held the city in my memory as the outer district of Paradise. Beyond lay Purgatory and Hell.

For many years, I wanted to return to Prague, but the fear of revisiting scenes of my childhood held me back. For certain writers—and I am among them—childhood is the source of everything. My childhood was cut off when I was eight and a half. When the Nazis invaded my homeland, I was thrown into a ghetto, then into a concentration camp, from which I finally escaped, into the forests. Because of these violent migrations, my early life was a sharp mixture of dreams and reality. Since then, every time I return to this part of the world I receive a shock. Very little of what I have imagined over the years remains, and even that little bit is bare and charmless.

In 1946, when I was fourteen, I emigrated to Israel, or Palestine, as it was then called. In those days, Israel was a disorienting place, a land of immigrants with sharply clashing outlooks, speaking a jumble of languages. Everyone tried to cling to his countrymen. Linguistically and culturally, the Jews of my early childhood had remained Hapsburgs, and, for many years after the empire crumbled, I regarded the Hapsburg Jews of Vienna, Prague, and Budapest whom I met in Israel as though they were from my own city of Czernowitz.

Israel was an idealistic country, and military and agricultural training went hand in hand. My first teacher of agriculture, Mordechai Planter, had immigrated from Prague. He had studied fruit-tree husbandry on a kibbutz, and become an expert. A highly cultivated man, he was a prototype of the Middle European Renaissance Jew turned farmer. From him, I learned not only about deciduous fruit trees but also about music, literature, painting—and

TULLIO PERICOLI

Prague. I was introduced to the names Rainer Maria Rilke and Franz Werfel, and my hazy childhood memory of Prague grew into something tangible.

I returned to Prague for the first time in 1998. I had been invited to an international writers' conference, and meeting so many fellow-writers from all over the world blurred what little actual memories I had retained of the city. Earlier last year, I returned again, and this time everything was different. The first of my books to be translated into Czech had just appeared. The publisher and editor held a reception in the firm's bookstore. Now I felt that I was

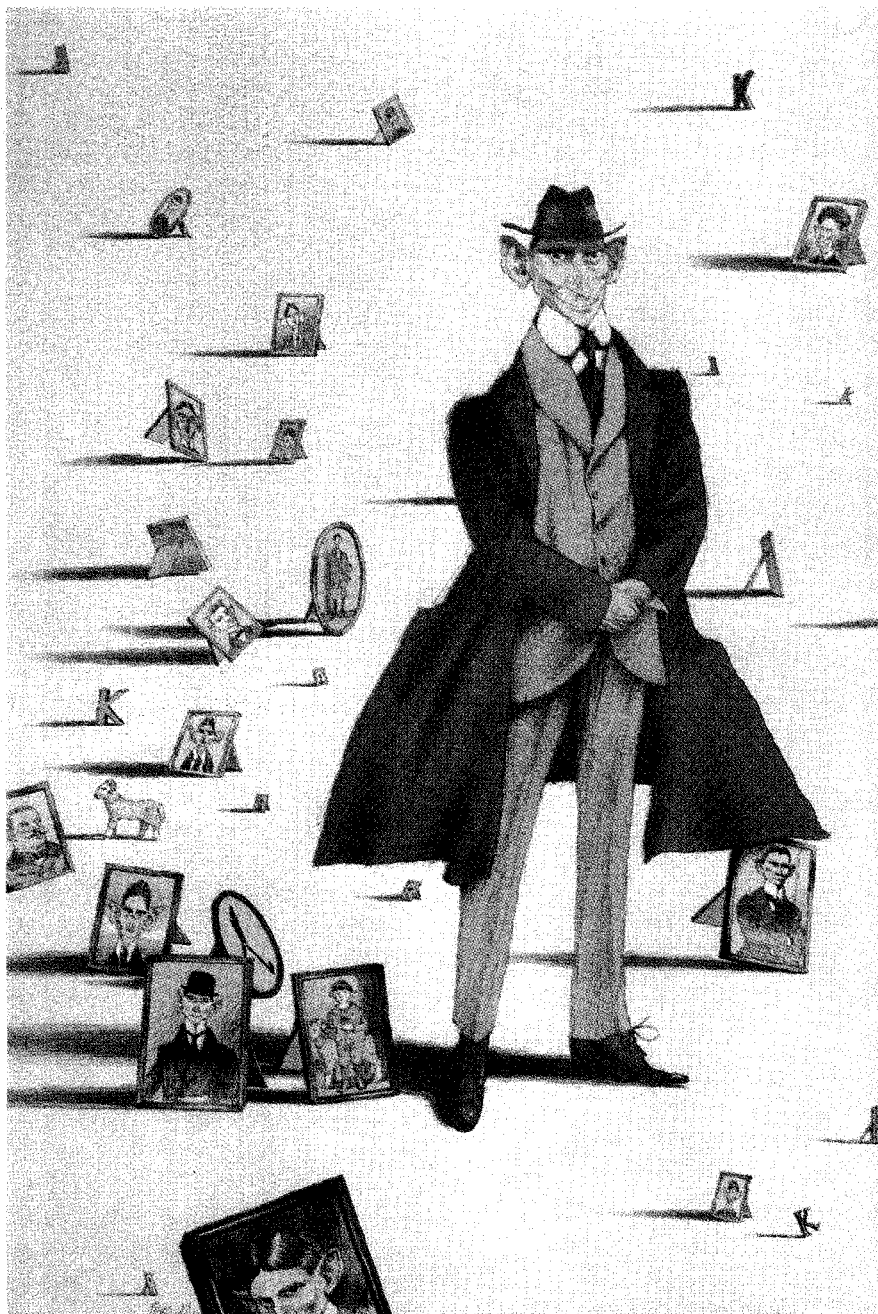
connecting to Prague through the notes of my own music.

I had prepared myself by reading about the history of Prague and its Jewish population, whose intellectuals, tradesmen, and artists had lived in the city from the eleventh century until the nineteen-forties. Like my parents and their friends in Czernowitz, the last generations of Prague's Jews had been shaped by the Enlightenment and by assimilation. Between the turn of the last century and the beginning of the Second World War, a new type of Prague Jew emerged—one who was both a realist and a romantic, whose ro-

manticism was tinged with Jewish belief. Before then, only a few members of the Prague intelligentsia—Franz Kafka and Max Brod among them—had sought intimacy with a Judaism that, to many Hapsburg Jews, appeared anachronistic and sectarian. How ironic it was that the Jews of Prague, who for so many years had devoted themselves to the idea of universalism, were soon accused of one sin—Jewishness. The judgment was executed in two stages. First, they were transported to ghettos such as Theresienstadt. From there, they were taken to extermination camps.

In recent years, many of the buildings that were neglected under the Communists had been renovated and painted, and the old splendor had returned to many corners of the city. After two days of wandering through the streets and the alleys, and visiting churches, museums, and the famous castle, I felt that the city was a giant façade, a puppet theatre extending in all directions; any minute now, the puppets would emerge from windows and doorways, like the Twelve Apostles in the magical clock in the Old Town Hall. It was disturbing to realize that all these old and hidden places, which had become exhibitions for tourists, once throbbed with real life. Mere skeletons of well-scrubbed stonework, they were like members of an impoverished nobility, their castles broken into, exposed to the weather.

Prague is one of the oldest cities in Europe. It was a bridge between East and West, and Jews served not only as merchants and middlemen but also as bearers of culture. In Prague, Jewish tradition expressed itself in all forms: rabbinism; mysticism; rationalism; modernism. Jewish creativity flourished here, in good and in bad times. The Old Jewish Cemetery, which was established in the fifteenth century, holds perhaps twenty thousand graves. On its gate is written "The House of Life." About twelve thousand gravestones remain crowded against one another, some decorated with religious symbols, most with their lettering worn and unreadable. Among the graves are those of the famous sixteenth-century sage the Maharal of Prague and his student the astronomer, mathematician, and historian David Gans. The New Jewish



Kafka T-shirts abound in Prague, but he remains a stranger there, as he was in life.

Cemetery, which is just outside the Old Town, is part of the new history of Prague Jewry: assimilation and the Holocaust. It contains, among twenty thousand graves, the final resting place of Franz Kafka.

I arrived in Prague with Hebrew translations of Kafka in my bag. At night, I read them in the hotel. Subconsciously, I suppose that I wanted to make Kafka happy by showing him that all his books had been translated into Hebrew, though I doubt if his knowledge of Hebrew was sufficient to have read his own works in that language. I was also under the illusion that, through Kafka's descriptions, I would be able to recognize particular locations—for example, the castle that is the central metaphor of one of his two great novels. In fact, the Prague Castle, approached uphill by tram, is a complex of buildings. Seeing the place today, packed with tourists, I found it hard to envision Kafka's mysterious edifice, with its gates and watchmen, locked with an infinity of bolts. But other landmarks from the writer's life and works were easier to identify. I walked to the Kinsky Palace, where Kafka's father had owned an elegant store. In the Old Town Square, I visited one of the family's apartments, which had been turned into a museum. I went

to the Carolinum, where Kafka studied, and I went, of course, to the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute, where he worked. There were times, as I visited the places in his life, when it seemed that he would emerge from one of the buildings, walking stick in hand, to join me on my stroll.

Yet Kafka remains, as he was in life, a stranger. He was a stranger to his family, to the city's Jewish community, to the Germans in whose language he wrote, and to the Czechs in whose midst he lived. He was a stranger in his own metaphysical writing. Today, the name of this modest and shy writer, who explored the deepest mysteries of life and his people's destiny, adorns T-shirts, café signs, and a pathetic store in the so-called Kafka Museum, which was displaying a few pieces of Judaica, some books about his writings, and a pointless video about his life. In the city where he was born and buried, there is no meaningful memorial to this greatest of twentieth-century writers.

Kafka died in 1924, years before the Holocaust, yet his name is connected to it, and not only because his three sisters and Milena Jesenská, a woman he loved, perished in concentration camps. All his puzzle-ridden writing is a kind of long nightmare about what was to come. I say "nightmare" and not

"prophecy," because what happened in reality was much more cruel than what Kafka had imagined. Kafka felt, even more strongly than Freud did, that demons lurked behind the mask of Western civilization. Fifteen years after his death, they burst out of the cellar in the form of the S.S. and other heartless abbreviations. In Kafka's work, the demons are defense lawyers and prosecutors, and there is still an illusion of justice. Words sound as though they still have value.

Although the word "Jew" does not appear in any of Kafka's fiction, he is a very Jewish writer. This is not, I think, because of his love for the Yiddish language and the Yiddish theatre, and not because he studied Hebrew and Judaism intensively. Rather, it is because of the deep Jewish anxiety that permeates everything he wrote. An unnamed threat, which ends in judgment and execution, stalks his riddling stories. We do not know the identity of the accuser and the accused, but we do know that fewer than twenty years stand between Kafka's apocalyptic fantasies and the Nazi takeover of Europe.

The setting of "In the Penal Colony" may be described as a place where sentencing is carried out. Those accused of breaking the law are tattooed; the law that has been broken is written on the length of their naked bodies by a huge apparatus. Carrying out such a sentence involves a great deal of determination and belief in the method. Was Kafka aware of its prophetic nature? I doubt it. For the most part, a true prophet is not aware of everything he is prophesying.

Kafka is possibly the last profound connection to Jewish Prague. He is the symbol of the assimilated Jew, who shed tribal and ethnic dress and created K., the man who seems to have no identifying characteristics. Yet the creature K. is so Jewish that you cannot assign him any other identity—a wanderer, hunted despite his innocence, consumed by anxiety, turning his intelligence and his emotions against himself with a painful, overheated imagination. Kafka was among the first modern writers who, out of the ashes of their own assimilation, sought to reconnect to their tribe.

In 1923, the year before he died, Kafka met Dora Dymant, a nineteen-



"Qualifications? Hello! I've only spent the last six years running a huge multinational Ferris wheel."

year-old woman who had fled to Berlin from her ultra-Orthodox Jewish family in Eastern Europe. She was young; she spoke Yiddish and Hebrew, and she intended to emigrate to Palestine. She had everything that Kafka longed for—physical health and authentic Jewishness. He spent his last days in her company. They read books in Hebrew and Yiddish together, holding fast to their dream of a new life in Palestine. These were perhaps the happiest days of his life.

At the beginning of the nineteen-fifties, in Israel, I became acquainted with Kafka's writing, and with his few surviving friends who lived in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Hugo Bergmann, who attended school with Kafka, was a professor of philosophy at Hebrew University. He and Kafka's editor, Max Brod, sought to cast the writer in a Jewish context, without diminishing the universal meaning of his work. Kafka's feeling for religion has always been a matter of controversy. Some have perceived him as an existentialist—a nihilist, even. It is no wonder that his works have provoked so many different responses. Religiosity without an institutionalized religion is problematic, but many of Kafka's generation, including Bergmann, Brod, Gershom Scholem, and Martin Buber, were drawn to Judaism without being willing to return to its institutions; they chose to become involved with religious thought intellectually. Buber, who was a teacher at Hebrew University in those years, often lectured on Jewish guilt, in the course of which he was fond of quoting Kafka.

Kafka was not internationally celebrated until after the Second World War. By then, though, he had become quite well known to a small circle of people living in Israel. They were all refugees; they all spoke German; and most of them had grown up in assimilated homes like Kafka's. Gershom Scholem illuminated Kafka's work with the Kabbalah. Although Scholem, a celebrated scholar of Jewish mysticism, did not write extensively about Kafka, he regarded him as a distant successor of the ancient Jewish mystics. Scholem often claimed that there were three pillars to Jewish mystical thought: the

Bible; the Zohar, or Book of Splendor, Jewish mysticism's key text; and the writings of Kafka. Other scholars pointed out that Kafka's way of thinking, in its twists and turns, was reminiscent of Talmudic debate. In the forties and fifties, in the cold stone houses of Jerusalem, the refugees sat and discussed Kafka's works as though they were religious texts. The discussion raised, as in a séance, the hopes, the illusions, and the demons of Western culture, disguised for many years, and unmasked during the war.

It is well known that Kafka, in his will, ordered Brod, his best friend, to destroy his manuscripts after his death. After much thought, Brod decided to violate the terms of the will and publish all the manuscripts in his keeping. We owe much to him, for Kafka had published little during his lifetime. In 1937, Brod wrote the first in-depth biography of Kafka. His intimate acquaintance with the writer and his environment meant that he was not always an objective observer, but whenever he spoke of Kafka—his humor, his relations with his friends, and their shared journeys—you immediately felt that the man had absorbed the very essence of Kafka, and that no one in the world knew Kafka better than he did.

I knew Brod well. We often roamed the streets of Tel Aviv together. A Renaissance man, he knew much about literature, general history, Jewish history, music, drawing, and theatre, and he was an author in his own right. He was aware that his own work was spread widely over many different fields, whereas his friend Kafka had plumbed the depths of one subject—his nightmares. Brod had immigrated to Palestine at practically the last moment—when it was still possible to leave Europe—in 1939, at the age of fifty-five. Even though he knew Hebrew, he had difficulty expressing himself, and, after meeting him years later, I often helped him write letters and short speeches. Although Brod never mastered spoken Hebrew, he marvelled at its revival. For me, arriving in Israel at the age of fourteen, Hebrew became a kind of mother tongue within a short while. The two of us lived out the wondrous resuscitation of the language.

Brod, a sharp thinker, but innocent

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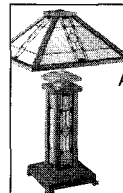
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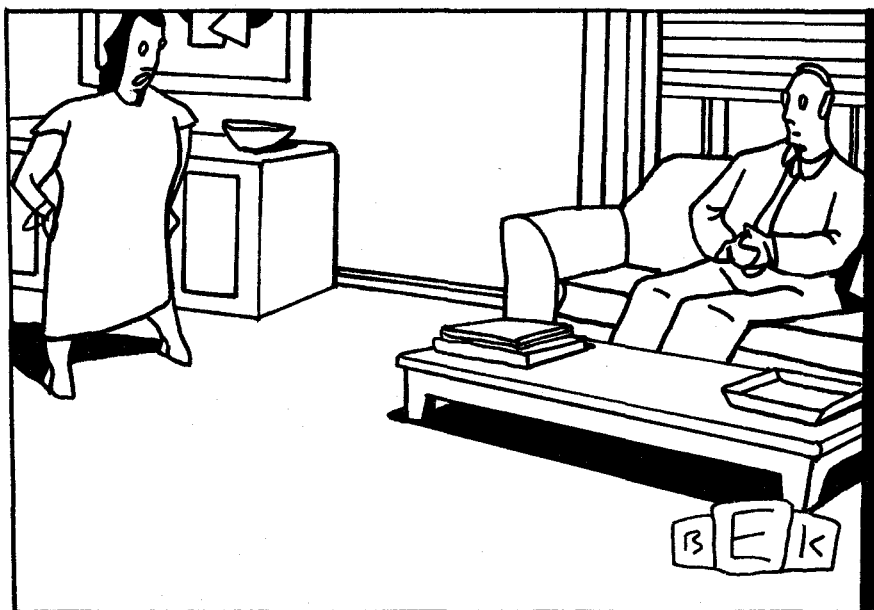


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"You know, in some cultures the male does things."

in matters of daily life, was exceptionally generous. Many young Prague writers owed their first publication to him, and he also supported my first literary steps. He treated me with fatherly warmth, directing me toward Kafka, rather than to his own writings, whenever I asked about artistic matters. He was my entrance into the magic forest known as Kafka. In my eyes, Brod and Kafka constitute the twin spirits of Prague.

Is it possible to distinguish between past and present in the Prague of today? In the time I spent there, I expected someone to approach me and say, "I knew Kafka, Max Brod, and Felix and Robert Weltsch well. I remember them sitting at the Café Savoy." This did not happen. There are only weak and hazy traces of these figures in the city. The dream of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which was to unite different nationalities under its rule and to minimize the power of chauvinism, was shattered in the First World War. Whether the city's pluralistic splendor will return, or whether, like impoverished nobility, it will be satisfied merely to display its lost history to tourists, is anyone's guess.

And yet something of the past intrudes on the present there, too. At

every gathering I attended in private homes, people who were half-Jews and quarter-Jews emerged, as if from hiding. They were shy, for the most part, and I could hardly get them to speak. Generally, one of their parents was a native of the area and a Holocaust survivor. The older people had felt certain that the Communist regime would have a positive influence on the Czechoslovakian people, but it quickly became clear that the Communists there were among the worst anti-Semites in Eastern Europe. Slowly, these people had learned to conceal their Jewishness; they had married non-Jews in the hope that their offspring would escape. Now these descendants were free in the world, but their inner selves were locked shut. In many ways, they were like Marranos: when pressed to talk, they spoke of their curiosity about their origins, and some of them had begun studying Hebrew, and even Yiddish.

One day, I met two young people, half-Jews, outside the Altneuschul synagogue, and spoke with them at length. Their every gesture suggested caution, even suspicion. They listened politely, and asked few questions. From what little they did say, I learned that they were lawyers by profession; somehow they had also acquired a not inconsiderable knowledge of Jewish history and

thought. I spoke openly about my life in Israel and my writing, breaking the ice. The whole time I spent with them, in the synagogue, and later, in a café, I could not shake the feeling that these Jews were Kafka's spiritual heirs. Perhaps even against their will, they, too, had turned, in their search for roots, into Jews, in the fullest meaning of the term.

The Altneuschul, which was built around 1270, is the oldest functioning synagogue in Europe. Its simple Gothic structure is impressive. Stairs lead downward from a tiny doorway. Many old synagogues were built underground, in accordance with the verse "Out of the depths I cry to You, O Lord." The feeling inside was like that of a fortress, the walls almost free of decoration. Throughout Europe, the Jewish bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century, in whom religious feeling was muffled, built splendid, ostentatious temples, in imitation of their Christian counterparts. But traditional synagogues are mostly small, unadorned structures that inspire spiritual concentration. Such is the Altneuschul. Something of the Jewish religiosity of the past is preserved. Here the Jews stood facing God without the mediation of sight or sound.

According to one story, *altneu* is not the German word for "old-new" but, rather, the Hebrew word *al-tnai*, meaning "on condition." Jewish legend has it that, after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, angels brought a stone from the rubble; it was placed in the Altneuschul's foundation on the condition that, when the Messiah arrived, the stone would be returned to the Holy City.

My visit to Prague was, finally, a way to lie down before the graves of ancestors. This feeling was palpable when I stood in front of Kafka's grave in the New Jewish Cemetery. A chilling Biblical verse is written in Hebrew on the cemetery gate: "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." During my walks at night in the Jewish Town, I remembered my family's confusing attitude toward Yom Kippur, the Jewish day of atonement. My father would close the shutters, so that Jews and non-Jews would not see that in our assimilated household Yom Kippur was no

more than a day like any other day. But things were different in the home of my grandparents, whom I often visited on this holiday. When I sat on Grandfather's lap in the synagogue on Yom Kippur, I was certain that God dwelled in the Holy Ark, and that, at any moment, when the doors were opened, He would be revealed.

Throughout my stay in Prague, I felt a certain sadness. There were times, however, when I felt uplifted, intoxicated, by a few lines of Kafka's prose. At those moments, I had a kind of revelation: only this place, wrapped in so much magnificent architecture dating back to the Middle Ages, could have given birth to Kafka's work. There is something medieval about the horror in Kafka, with its circuses, vagrants, peculiar artists, animals, and a bit of Dante's Hell.

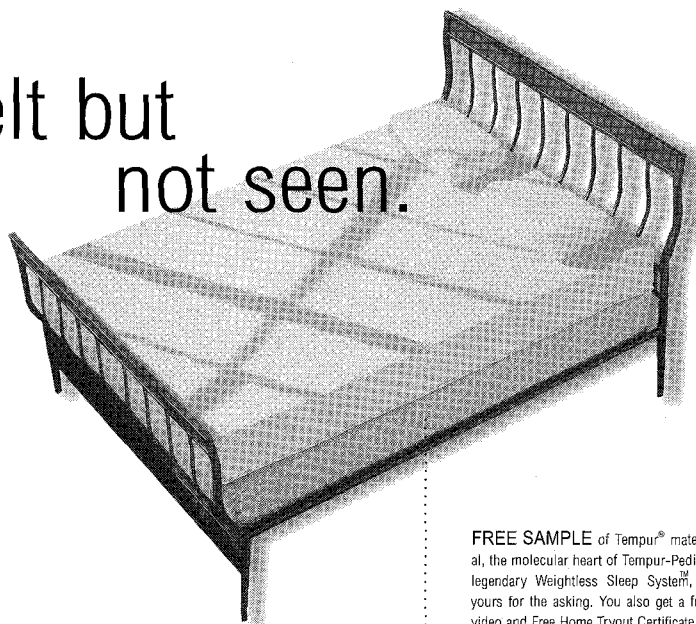
After a week in Prague, I returned to my home near Jerusalem. The books on Prague and its Jews lay on the table just as I had left them—books in Hebrew and German, the languages of Prague Jewry. I had seen only some of the many things I had wanted to see. Yet even that little bit had overwhelmed me.

The April skies are clear in Jerusalem. I love this clarity, which reminds me of Biblical prose. Jews wrote about many matters and in many styles, but there is nothing like the simplicity they attained in the Bible. The Talmud, the Midrash, philosophy, mystical writings, and modern writing, too, are all more complex, more entangled. The return to Jerusalem is always a return to a Biblical verse, to a kind of simplicity and lightness. Strange that this city, which has known so many cruel wars, is not gloomy. The plentiful light of its skies, especially at dusk, immerses you in a kind of quiet spirituality.

A few days after my return, I dreamed about my parents. They had not aged since we were together sixty-three years ago in Prague, and their faces expressed amazement that I had grown older. We were briefly united in mutual astonishment, and I knew that I had something important to tell them. But, as in every profound dream, I could not get the words out. ♦

(Translated, from the Hebrew, by Lisa Katz.)

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RETHINKING THE BRAIN

How the songs of canaries upset a fundamental principle of science.

BY MICHAEL SPECTER

Fernando Nottebohm has lived transfixed by the melodies of songbirds. He is sixty now, and it has been decades since he left the plains of Argentina—first to study agriculture in Nebraska, then zoology at Berkeley, before coming to rest, in 1967, at Rockefeller University, in New York. But his interest in birds has sustained him since his earliest childhood. “Finding out how birds sing and why they would bother and what it means has been the puzzle of my life,” he told me when we met for the first time, this winter. Nottebohm is a courtly man, and though he has spent the bulk of his career at Rockefeller, his restrained demeanor seems out of place at the giant biotechnology mill on York Avenue. After all, this is the era of genomes and molecular biology; mice crafted from engineered genes and bred to live in Plexiglas boxes have come to dominate medical research. To Nottebohm’s colleagues, his preoccupation with the song systems of zebra finches and canaries and with how black-capped chickadees remember where they hide their food has always seemed quaint, even touching—if perhaps beside the point. Yet, over the past three decades, in dozens of elegant experiments that produced results nobody had envisioned (and for years very few believed), Nottebohm’s obsession with how birds learn to sing set off a chain of discoveries that have fundamentally altered the way scientists think about the brain. It has also opened a tantalizing, if tentative, new route toward treating degenerative conditions that are often considered beyond hope—from Parkinson’s disease and multiple sclerosis to spinal-cord injuries, strokes, and Alzheimer’s disease.

The bird brain has an undeservedly bad reputation. It’s not easy to fly or to learn meaningful music. To do both is an anatomical triumph. Nottebohm was certainly not the first man to be beguiled

by birdsong. Beethoven, Bach, and Vivaldi all transformed avian music into instrumental works; Mozart turned a starling’s song into the closing variations of one of his best-known piano compositions, the Concerto in G. Nottebohm believed that if he could understand how birds acquire their songs it would make a wonderful model of the way the brain learns. Many birds produce just one tune and sing it until they die. Nottebohm was more interested in those birds, like canaries, which can learn new melodies each year. Canaries live, on average, for ten years, cover a wide octave range, and sing for several reasons: to announce themselves, to claim territory, and to scare away other males when they look for a mate. (Females rarely sing.) As Charles Darwin noted, a songbird’s early, rudimentary attempts at vocalization—called subsong—have a lot in common with the babbling of a human infant. By the time canaries are eight months old, though, they sing like adults, and their habits never vary: they sing throughout the breeding season, in the spring, and then, during the summer molting season, they shed the songs as if they were feathers. The next spring, the same birds will turn up with an entirely new repertoire. Who was teaching the birds these new songs, Nottebohm wondered. And what was happening in their brains to let them learn?

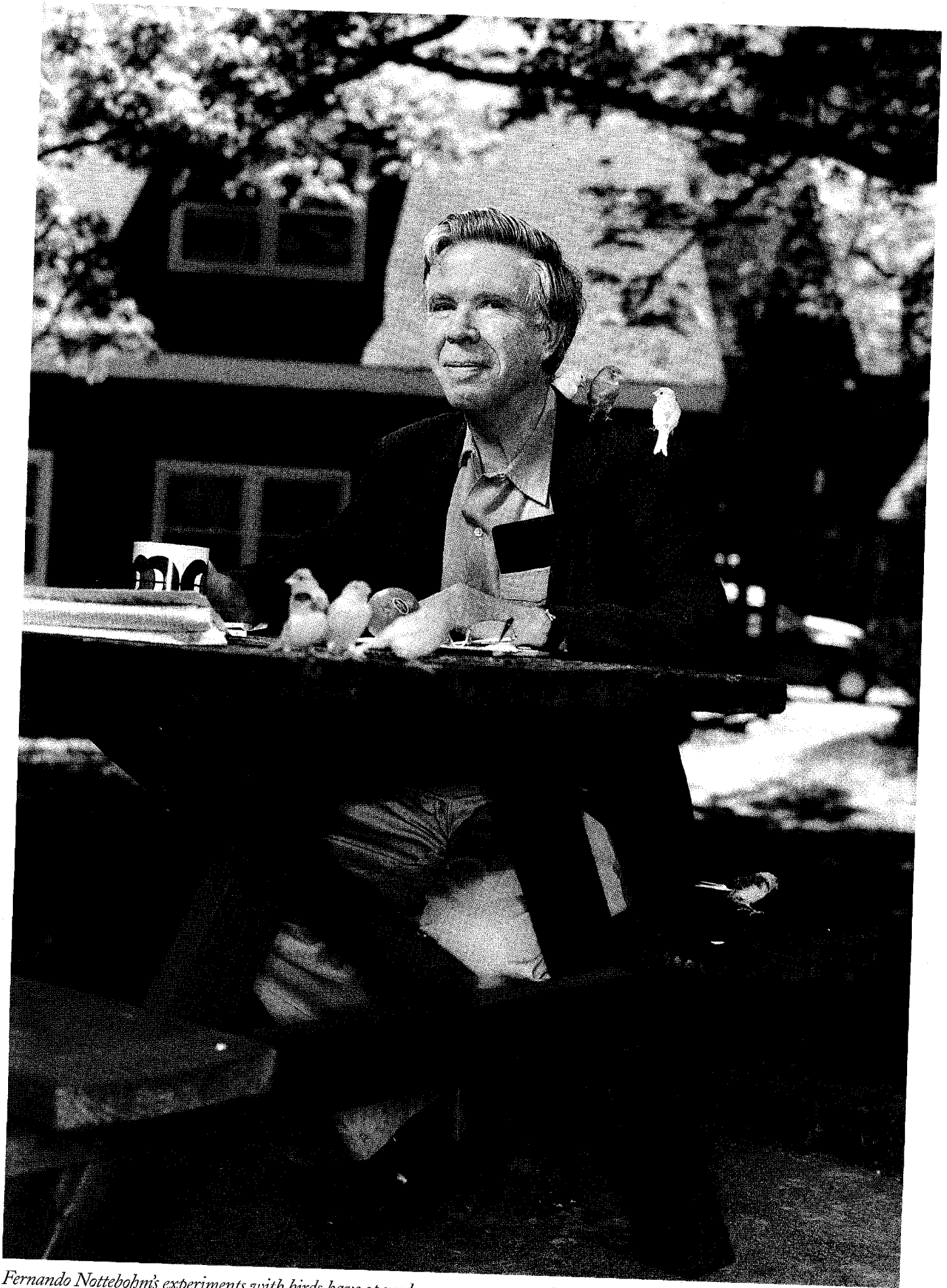
“It’s not that I was uninterested in human health, but I really cared most about birdsong as a model for the brain,” Nottebohm told me when we met at his Rockefeller laboratory. He doesn’t come to the lab often; most days, he can be found in the rolling fields of the university’s ethological-research center, in upstate New York, among thousands of carefully tended canaries and zebra finches. “As it happens, there are some obvious connections between birds and humans. It was just a practical example

of the ways in which scientific discovery is totally unpredictable. And the complexity of the brain—well, I have never stopped being amazed by it.

“I have always been intrigued by religious questions,” he went on. “To what extent were people special? What is this thing called the mind, and how is it different from the brain?” Whether the brain was simply the sum of its molecules—“You’re nothing but a pack of neurons” was how the Nobel laureate Francis Crick put it—or whether all that biology added up to something more has been debated for centuries. “We have some close relatives,” Nottebohm said. “Chimps, even monkeys. But they can’t speak. No primate can speak. It’s only humans who do it. When you look around the animal kingdom, birds are one animal that attempts vocally to do anything like what we do.”

By the early seventies, Nottebohm had begun to publish a series of remarkable observations that traced the genesis of birdsong to specific clusters of neurons—the cells into which memories are wired and through which complex actions are processed. First, almost by accident, he demolished the notion that handedness—the idea that one is born either right-handed or left-handed—was the exclusive province of humanity. The syrinx, the songbird’s voice box, turns out to have two sources of sound, which originate on different sides of the trachea. In an attempt to establish their role in singing, Nottebohm cut the nerves leading to one side or the other. The results astonished him. Cutting the left nerve mostly silenced the birds; cutting the right had practically no effect. “Some property of their brain induced canaries to be left-handed singers,” he told me. “With other birds the right side is dominant.” If birds demonstrated such a

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARTIN SCHOELLER



Fernando Nottebohm's experiments with birds have opened a new route toward treating diseases like Parkinson's.

uniquely human quality, Nottebohm reasoned, maybe the patterns of avian behavior would be relevant in other ways, too.

Next, he tried to figure out why male canaries sing and females almost never do. To his surprise, Nottebohm noticed that certain parts of the brains in the songbirds were as much as four times larger in males than in females. He also found that if you give testosterone to a female canary its song nuclei will double in size, and it will sing more like a male. "That was a real shock, because we had all been taught that an adult brain was supposed to stay the same size, with the same cells, forever," Nottebohm said. "It was one of the few uncontested facts about the brain. So how could it get bigger? That contradicted everything I had ever learned."

To study the environmental effects, Nottebohm compared the brains of birds kept in cages with those of birds that lived in the wild. Again, the differences were striking: a free-ranging chickadee, which has to avoid predators and forage for its food, produced larger numbers of new neurons in the hippocampus—the part of the brain that plays an essential role in the storage of memories—than a caged chickadee. In cold weather, a chickadee becomes desperate for calories; it must eat before it sleeps or it will die. So remembering the many places where it stashes seeds is of urgent importance.

At first, Nottebohm had wondered if neurons grew in bulk to accommodate these challenges. In 1981, he wrote a

paper, called "A Brain for All Seasons," in which he speculated that the cells swell and shrink at different times of year. But even as he wrote, he told me, he wasn't sure that he was right. "Damn it, I said, this is strange. It's not supposed to happen. We all know that brains in adult animals don't change. Cells die as you get older, and that's it. What was going on here?"

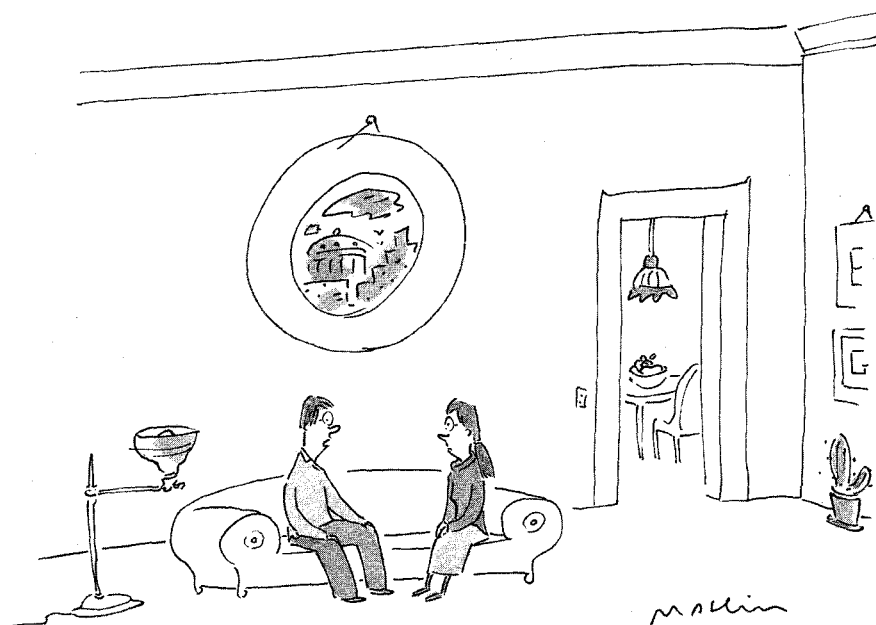
For many years, it had been held as one of neuroscience's basic principles that sophisticated animals—and certainly humans—are born with essentially every brain cell they will ever have. Throughout the twentieth century, attempts to suggest otherwise were dismissed, largely because neurons are not like other cells. After infancy, they don't divide and they don't grow. Although the process was not fully understood, brain researchers assumed that adding new memories and knowledge required us somehow to rewire the circuitry of cells that have been in place from the beginning of our lives. But one day in 1981, while Nottebohm was in the shower, he had the type of insight that happens in books far more often than in life. "I think I actually said the word 'eureka,'" he told me as we sat in the Rockefeller faculty cafeteria one snowy day last winter. "I dried myself off and went to my wife and said, 'Do you know what could explain all these changes we are seeing? What if every day new cells are born in the brain and others die? Wouldn't that explain why some birds learn new songs and for-

get old ones? The neurons filled with old memories could be exchanged for new ones.' I thought, Maybe the dogma of our lifetime was just completely wrong. My wife, Marta, was very excited and urged me to test this idea at once."

The more he thought about his idea, the more sense it made. If, in order to survive the winter, a black-capped chickadee had to remember hundreds of places where it had hidden food, or if a canary needed to keep the exact melody of a forty-note song in its brain in order to attract a mate, it might require more neurons than birds that didn't have such demands. "The idea that neurons in the adult brain come and go was considered the view of a lunatic," he said. "If you cut your arm, new cells will grow. If you cut your brain, it's going to stay cut. That's one reason strokes are so devastating and why brain injuries rarely heal. Neurons don't come back. But I decided to look again at that assumption. I have always been seen as one of those scientists with good intuition, but one who is maybe simple in his approach. Now people were saying my intuition had dried up. People in my own lab begged me to stop. I saw the pity in their eyes. They were saying, 'Fernando has lost it completely.'"

Nottebohm needed to prove that neurons were replaced in the adult brain. By the early sixties, technology had been developed to help. When a cell is about to divide, it starts making DNA. A radioactive hydrogen molecule attached to the thymidine needed for cell division could be injected into a brain cell and become a permanent part of the cell; if the cell divided, the resulting cells would all be marked as well. In that way, it would be possible to determine the time and place of any cell born after the injection. Nottebohm and one of his doctoral students, Steven Goldman, injected birds with the radioactive molecule every day for a week. Then they waited a month, killed the birds, and examined neurons from various parts of their brains. "What we found," Nottebohm told me, still shaking his head in surprise nearly twenty years later, "was a huge pool of labelled cells—and many of the cells were new neurons. Every bird, young or old, was producing thousands of them each day."

The discovery that new nerve cells are generated in an adult brain—the process is called neurogenesis—over-



"You want a child, I want a dog. Can't we compromise?"

turned a century of scientific theory. And it has the potential to do much more: if neurons are continually born in the brain of a human adult, as Nottebohm discovered they were with canaries, researchers might be able to influence how those neurons develop and to replace dying and failing cells with new ones. That would allow advances in the treatment of brain injuries and many types of degenerative disease. "That is the Holy Grail for us," said one of Nottebohm's former students, Arturo Alvarez-Buylla, who is now a professor of neurosurgery at the University of California, San Francisco. "What we are talking about is teaching the brain to repair itself with its own cells. It's not going to be a simple task. It's a type of magic, really, but eventually I think it's going to be possible. And for that we should thank Fernando and his birds."

Fernando Nottebohm holds a chair at one of the nation's most prestigious universities, and his research is considered beyond reproach. "Intellectually, Fernando is a free spirit, which is what I admire most about him," Eric Kandel, of Columbia University, said when I called to ask about Nottebohm's work. Last year, Kandel won the Nobel Prize for research into how synapses in the brain affect learning and memory. "He turned out to be absolutely right about neurogenesis, and it has led to one of the great paradigm shifts of modern biology."

Nevertheless, Nottebohm's discovery that adult birds give birth to a steady stream of new brain cells was hardly greeted with jubilation; Kandel himself was highly skeptical. In 1984, Nottebohm presented his most important findings to a conference in New York sponsored by the Institute for Child Development Research. He demonstrated not only how canaries produce new neurons but also how those neurons function at times when memory was particularly essential. He also mentioned, in an offhand way, that if new neurons could integrate themselves so successfully into the brains of adult canaries, perhaps that would be the case with humans. Many in the audience were hostile to the idea; others laughed. Skepticism is the prime currency of science, and challenging a basic belief about how the brain works brought much of that attitude to the



"Do I detect a Middle Eastern accent?"

surface. Researchers wanted to know how Nottebohm could be sure these new cells were neurons. The brain is composed mostly of glial cells—often seen as the glue that binds neurons together. But there are many types of neurons, and it is not always easy for a professional to distinguish between them and glia, even under a microscope or after using sophisticated labelling techniques. Nottebohm's colleagues also wanted to know how he could be certain that the cells were new, and how they had managed to migrate from one part of the brain to function in another.

There was another, largely unspoken, response to Nottebohm's research. "People basically said, 'Even if this is true, big deal. It's just birds. All they do is fly around,'" Charles G. Gross told me. Gross, a professor at Princeton for thirty years, knows about the skepticism of colleagues. He withstood a wall of disbelief in the late sixties after discovering the neurons that the brain uses to recognize faces. "First, people said Fernando must be wrong," Gross told me. "He suggested from the start this could have

important implications for learning and memory in humans. But when they saw how convincing his work was . . . people smiled and said, 'Old Fernando found a cute thing about birds.'"

One important reason for the doubts about Nottebohm's work was that questions had been raised by Pasko Rakic, who is perhaps the foremost student of the primate brain in America. Rakic, who for many years has been the chairman of the neurobiology department at the Yale University School of Medicine, has spent much of his life looking at the brains of rhesus monkeys, which are closely related to humans; and although few believed that primates could generate new neurons, the proposition had never been tested when Nottebohm released his findings on canaries. It didn't take long for Rakic to recognize the significance of the studies, though. The implications for humans "of even a minute turnover" of neurons would be "enormous," he wrote in a widely read paper called "Limits of Neurogenesis in Primates," which he published in 1985. New brain cells would mean new ap-



Elizabeth Gould, with two of her children. At Princeton, she pushed the field of neurogenesis further than anyone else had.

proaches to even the most terrible neurological problems and diseases.

Rakic's paper described his study of the brains of twelve rhesus monkeys ranging in age from six months to eleven years. He injected each of the monkeys with specially labelled thymidine and then killed them after intervals that varied from three days to more than six years. The labelled thymidine allowed Rakic to trace the development of neurons in the brain of every monkey he studied; by following the labels, he was able to examine more than a hundred thousand individual cells in each of them. The results were not ambiguous. "Not a single" cell with the physical characteristics of a neuron born after infancy "was observed in the brain of any adult animal," Rakic wrote. Although he acknowledged that no biological finding is ever final, he concluded that the dogma should stand: by the time a monkey—and, by inference, a human baby—is a few months old, it has all the neurons it is going to get.

Not long ago, I went to New Haven to visit Rakic. He is sixty-seven years old, a nearly bald, dapper man with a wry sense of humor. Rakic has been in America for years and his English is flawless, although he has retained the accent of his native Yugoslavia. Rakic showed me his slides; cells from monkey brains were stored in boxes scattered around his office. There were thousands, all neatly labelled. "You know, I am often considered as the bad guy in this discussion of neurogenesis," Rakic said. "People want the new cells because they think it offers new hope. And they think I am the guy who always says, 'Read my lips—no new neurons.' But that was never really my position. I did not object to Fernando's birds. I only objected when he said that what he saw in canaries could be applied to human beings."

Rakic says that it makes no biological or evolutionary sense for human adults to replace the building blocks that provide their memories. "We learn our memories and store them in synaptic circuits and in neurons," he said. "If you replaced them, you would not have those memories anymore. I speak with this accent because I use the neurons that were wired into my brain when I learned how to talk. Then, unfortunately, when I learned English as an adult, those neu-

rons were still in control of my vocal cords. If I were somehow able to replace them, as canaries do, I would speak perfect English. But if I then went back to Europe I wouldn't recognize my own mother, because the new neurons in my brain would never have seen her."

Rakic argues that gradually, over millions of years, humans traded the ability to make new neurons for the ability to keep them. For an adult human to shed thousands of neurons and slip a few thousand new ones into the same space would be a bit like trying to rip out two floors of the Empire State Building and replace them brick by brick without affecting the rest of the building. "Even if you could do it, it would be a Faustian bargain," Rakic said. "Perhaps you would get rid of the neurons that gave you problems and get new ones that worked right. And the price for that could be that you—as a unique person with a unique group of memories—would no longer exist."

"You could take a canary from Northern California, put it in Southern California, and the next year it might even sing with a Southern California accent. That's a hell of a trick, particularly since after all these years I still speak with a Croatian accent. But, when Fernando stood up and said that even while we are talking you are making a bunch of new neurons in your brain, I simply said no, you don't. We have never seen that. It just doesn't make sense."

The issue disappeared after Rakic published his paper, in 1985. He is a persuasive man, and those who believed that adult neurogenesis mattered decided that it mattered only in lower animals, where the complexities of human memory did not exist. By chance, however, in 1989, in another laboratory at Rockefeller University, a young postdoctoral researcher in behavioral neuroscience named Elizabeth Gould, who was investigating the action of specific hormones in the brains of rats, stumbled onto something in her research that didn't add up. Gould had arrived at Rockefeller that year to work with Bruce McEwen, one of the world's leading experts on how stress affects the brain. "We noticed that if we took the adrenal glands out of a rat many cells in the hippocampus rapidly began to die," she told me not long ago. People with Addison's

disease, which is caused by a severe deficiency of the hormones normally created in the adrenal glands, suffer similar cell destruction. "The effect is massive," Gould said. "You don't even need statistics to see it." Yet, when she counted the cells that remained, she could detect no decrease in the number of neurons. She was stunned. Gould asked herself, "Were our accounting methods completely screwed up? How could thousands of cells disappear and there still be the same number as there were before?"

Gould, who was then twenty-six, went to the Rockefeller library in search of some precedent for the bizarre effect she had noticed. (This was before the Internet provided the most efficient way for a scientist to review what had previously been published in her field.) "I have strong memories of sitting in this ancient room, looking through the Index Medicus, and going back a long, long time until I finally found evidence of adult neurogenesis," she said. She found what she was looking for in a series of reports published beginning in 1962—the year Gould was born—by a researcher at M.I.T. named Joseph Altman. At the time, the new technique of labelling a cell with thymidine to determine the birth date of neurons was used in newborns, since adult animals were not thought to create new neurons. But Altman decided to try the technique with adults. He published several papers in the most reputable scientific journals, claiming that new neurons are formed in the brains of adult rats, cats, and guinea pigs—a discovery that Nottebohm later made with canaries. Because the techniques Altman used were primitive, however, they were open to reasonable doubt. It was a classic example of a discovery made ahead of its time. At first, Altman was ignored, then he was ridiculed, and finally, after failing to receive tenure at M.I.T., he moved to Purdue. With no recognition, he was quickly forgotten. The field almost dried up. A decade later, Michael Kaplan, a researcher at Boston University and later at the University of New Mexico, used an electron microscope to supply more compelling evidence that several parts of the adult brain, including the cortex, also produced neurons. He, too, met resistance from researchers who did not find his work convincing. ("Those may look



like neurons in New Mexico," Kaplan remembers Rakic saying at the time. "But they don't in New Haven.") Kaplan had published his findings in important journals and even suggested a novel way to test the phenomenon in humans, but he, too, was ignored, and he left the field.

Gould barely knew Nottebohm in 1989, although their labs were only a few hundred yards from each other. But she also came across his work in the library, and suddenly it all clicked. "I realized what had to be going on," she told me. "The brain was making new neurons to compensate for the ones that died. That is why the numbers didn't change. It was so simple, but it was one of these things you were trained not to think about." With McEwen's support, Gould shifted the focus of her research from hormones to neurogenesis. "For a long time, although nobody was interested in what we were doing and we couldn't get our papers into fancy journals, there was a sustaining excitement to it," she said. "I felt that if I don't study this no one else will. It was interesting and it was potentially very important. But I have to tell you I also enjoyed it because the field was so small."

For eight years, Gould carried out her work on neurogenesis in McEwen's lab. In 1997, she moved to Princeton. She was thirty-four, with many publications to her name; but neurogenesis had only sporadic scientific support and she was as far out on a limb as a researcher can go. In

little more than three years, however, she had been given tenure and a full professorship—a previously unimaginable leap in her department at Princeton—having demonstrated with new and more convincing techniques that cells are born in the brains of adult rats. She pushed the field further than anyone else had. The year Gould arrived in Princeton, she reported that neurons were produced in the hippocampus of adult tree shrews (which are similar to early primates). In humans, the hippocampus is the principal area where Alzheimer's disease develops.

The next year, she published a paper demonstrating that a New World monkey, the marmoset, also makes neurons as an adult. (Primates that live in Africa and Asia—places that Europeans had explored before Columbus—are known as Old World monkeys; New World monkeys live in Central and South America.) Then she repeated the work using macaques, Old World primates that are more closely related to humans. Finally, in 1999, she and her colleagues discovered that not only are cells produced in the adult primate brain but they even appear in the neocortex—the most sophisticated region of the brain, which is responsible for language and complex thought. It was her most controversial work and it has yet to be repeated, but Gould reported that these new cells had migrated to the cortex from another part of the brain, had quickly developed

into mature neurons, and had integrated themselves into the circuitry there.

Gould, whose background was in behavioral psychology, also undertook a series of experiments that suggested a strong relationship between the number of neurons an animal generates and the challenges it faces. Certain types of events seem to require the adult brain to make more neurons, and others appear to prevent that from happening. She found, for instance, that a brain needs to "use it or lose it"—if new cells are not put to work, they will die more rapidly than if they have a purpose. Also, through several studies in which she examined the effects of stress on the brain, Gould demonstrated the adverse effects that social subordination or fear can have: expose a rodent to the scent of a predator (in this case a fox) and it will become so anxious that its production of new neurons will quickly fall away. The studies, when combined with results from others, echoed Nottebohm's earlier research with birds and showed not only that new neurons were generated by adults but that active animals appeared to generate more of them.

There was one problem with Gould's work, though. The results seemed to contradict the theories of Pasko Rakic, and he has not been reticent about suggesting that Gould's methods were flawed. Disagreement and debate require scientists to repeat their studies; it's a fundamental precept that if you can't repeat something it cannot be taken seriously. Yet this was debate of a different order. Rakic, a former president of the Society for Neuroscience, is one of the seminal researchers in his field. In order to avoid a clash with someone so eminent, Gould would have had to permit herself to become marginalized, like Altman, or follow her predecessor Kaplan out of the business. She had no intention of doing that.

Gould, an animated woman with long dark hair, is the youngest tenured member of the Princeton psychology department, and among the most prominent. She is sought after by other universities, teaches what she wants, and this year was able to persuade Princeton to buy a four-hundred-thousand-dollar confocal microscope for the exclusive use of her lab. She is tenacious; her third

child was born last November, and four days later she was standing in Peyton Hall, lecturing to a roomful of students. Gould grew up on Long Island, went to college at St. John's and graduate school at U.C.L.A., and then married her high-school sweetheart. (He is a vascular radiologist at a Philadelphia hospital.) When I asked her how she came to select U.C.L.A. for graduate school, she replied, not completely in jest, "Good weather." Not until she received a Ph.D., in 1988, did she think seriously about an academic career. "I was not one of these people who knew when they were a little kid that they wanted to be a scientist," she told me. "I was not a person who had some quest or problem in my destiny to solve. Basically, I wanted to have a good time. I hung around the beach, and I thought psychology was reasonably interesting. It wasn't until I came back to New York and I was doing my postdoc at Rockefeller that I became so consumed by it."

In most ways, Gould is a typical bench scientist: driven, perfectionist, aggressively interested in teasing out the most inexplicable elements of a complex story. Yet her rise has not been without complications. Gould told me that when her first child, a girl, was born, just as her career was taking off, in 1991, she didn't see how she could continue to teach. "I had decided to put her in day care and go right back to work," she said. "Then she was born and I fell in love with her and I thought she couldn't possibly survive without me. I was at this weird point of moving from a postdoc to the junior faculty, and I had to write big grants to keep moving up, and for a while there I was just falling apart. My husband was really great. He said, 'You know, you worked so hard to get to this point, if you give up you are going to be miserable. You will feel like a failure.' If he had said something else—if he had said, 'Oh, it's terrible, I can see how you feel, why don't you just take a year off'—well, that would have been bad in the end. Bad for me, for my children, and for my work. I would have never been happy in my life if I had taken that turn. So I bit the bullet. It was hard, but I went back to work."

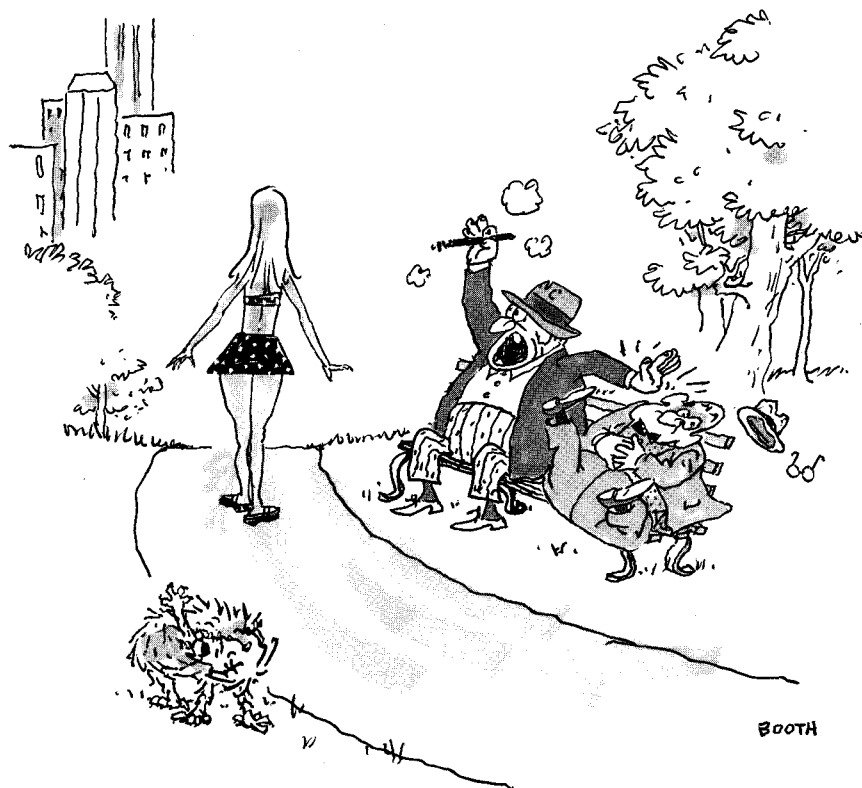
Gould's controversial successes do not always thrill her. "You can find yourself thinking about what you should do next to satisfy your critics, instead of what is the most interesting thing you could do as

a scientist," she told me. "That is the route right to death. When you make decisions about your life based on what the scientific community is saying, you should quit. I think about that a lot these days. I mean, if you are doing your research for some other scientist, why even bother?"

Gould has a compelling air of distracted urgency. She manages to be both completely focussed and endearingly forgetful at the same time. ("I left my slide carousel once in a cab in Boston, once at a conference in Greece, once in Maryland, and once in D.C. I got it back from the cab in Boston. But losing a carousel with all your work in it four times is not a good record. I took it as a sign.") With the demands of a family, a full teaching schedule, and many experiments constantly in progress, Gould turns away speaking engagements by the dozen. She often finds conferences a useless distraction, and acknowledges that the politics of such events make her queasy—mostly because she is not one of the boys. It is an attitude that worries her mentor, Bruce McEwen. "There is a danger," he told me. "There is the green eye of jealousy, and Liz has to face that. If she were a pretender on her way up, she would be dead. But she is a full professor and al-

ready widely recognized in our field. So I think she can ride out the opposition. . . . But I have intended to have a talk with her, at least when her youngest kid is a little bit older. Because, frankly, I think she could be hurting herself. You don't have to love it or focus on it, but you have to play the game you are in. It just gets misinterpreted if you withdraw, and I don't want that to happen to her."

Gould told me that she isn't even certain that she wants to continue with neurogenesis, and although she would not say it directly, Pasko Rakic is clearly part of the reason. When I went to see Rakic at Yale, he spent a long time disputing some of her latest findings; he could find no evidence of neurons in the cortex, and he is convinced that Gould (together with her Princeton colleague Charles Gross) made a mistake in labelling the cells. (They, on the other hand, wonder whether Rakic is fully comfortable with the complicated new molecular-labelling techniques needed to do this research.) A week after we met, Rakic telephoned me. "I wanted to tell you about something, but I didn't know if it was appropriate," he said. He went on to say that after consulting with a Yale University ethicist he had decided he could



"Rouse yourself, Weintraub! The miniskirt is back!"

go ahead. "We examined the slides from that Gould study and photographed them and we did not find new neurons. I asked for permission to use the slides in a paper I am writing," Rakic told me. "And they refused." It was an extraordinary accusation, so I asked Gould about it. She said that Rakic had asked to visit her lab, but that she was about to deliver her third child, had preeclampsia, and thought she might have to be induced into labor at any moment. So she sent Rakic the slides, and, as is not uncommon in scientific disputes, he interpreted the data differently. (Gould and Gross intend to use the slides in an article they are writing and don't want Rakic to publish them first.)

That was only the latest skirmish between Gould and Rakic. In the fall of 1998, they came close to a very public showdown at a scientific forum in Los Angeles. Earlier that year, Gould had found neurogenesis in adult macaques; Rakic had not. Before a scheduled press conference, at the annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience, Rakic suddenly announced that he, too, had discovered neurogenesis in Old World monkeys. Rakic told me that evidence was hard to find because the brain produced so few of the new cells. Gould disagrees, noting that she has found the phenomenon in rats, mice, tree shrews, marmosets, and two species of macaques and has never noticed a significant difference in the quantity of new cells.

At Princeton, Gould shook off several direct questions about Rakic. After I visited Yale, however, I asked again whether she thought his continued skepticism about her research was fair. In replying, she finally permitted herself to look back on this steady opposition to her work. "When I was studying adult neurogenesis in the hippocampus of the rat," she said, "the rat was unimportant [to Rakic]. When we found adult neurogenesis in the hippocampus of the marmoset, a New World monkey, the New World monkey was unimportant. Then, when we studied adult neurogenesis in the hippocampus of the macaque, an Old World monkey that Rakic has studied throughout his career, our methods were faulty. Then he used these same methods to demonstrate the identical finding. Now that we have found adult neurogenesis in the neocortex of the macaque, it is our methods again."

FIRST YEAR

It was our first home—
our damp, upstairs,
one-year aerie—
above a tree-lined area
nearer the city.

My talkative, unsure,
unsettled self
was everywhere;
but you
were the clear spirit of somewhere.

At night
when we settled down
in the big bed by the window,
over the street light,
and the first crackle of spring

eased the iron at
the base of the railings,
unpacking crocuses,
it was
the awkward corners of your snowy town

Fernando Nottebohm, who admires Rakic and considers him one of the most insightful people in neuroscience, was more direct. "Pasko has taken on the role of hard-nosed defender of standards," he said. "And that's fine—it's even warranted. But we have to keep in mind that he missed this discovery altogether. It's something he should have seen, and he just blew it. And, frankly, as much as I hate to say this, I think Pasko Rakic single-handedly held the field of neurogenesis back by at least a decade."

At first glance, San Diego seems a strange place to claim as the capital of American brain research. It is filled with seals sunning themselves on the beaches and tourists in search of aquatic adventures. People seem constantly to be hovering in the air, hang gliding from promontories above the Pacific Ocean. When I was there, during the Buick Invitational golf tournament, the conversation almost everywhere, as absurd as it now seems, centered on whether Tiger Woods would get his groove back. Yet, if you ride around La Jolla for long, you will almost certainly drive past the Scripps Research Institute or the Salk Institute

for Biological Studies. Neither is far from Nobel Drive or, for that matter, from the Burnham Institute or the University of California, San Diego, which has one of the world's foremost centers of brain research. In fact, San Diego has far more than its demographic share of members of the National Academy of Sciences, not to mention Nobel laureates. Francis Crick, the eighty-five-year-old president emeritus of Salk, still shows up at his office. There are also dozens of private companies spread along the sun-drenched coast with names like Advanced Tissue Sciences and Neurome.

Scores of laboratories at universities and in private industry are now in on the search for the origins, mechanism, and meaning of neurogenesis. But if Elizabeth Gould has one genuine competitor—and a complete antithesis—it is Fred Gage, who is co-director of the Laboratory of Genetics at the Salk Institute. Where Gould guards her privacy and declines invitations to most meetings, Gage is one of America's most public scientists. Gage, who is fifty, holds one of three endowed chairs at Salk. He is the chairman of the scientific advisory council of the Christopher

which filled
the rooms we made
and stayed there all year with
the burnt-orange lampshade,
the wasps in the attic.

Where is the soul of a marriage?

Because I am writing this
not to recall our lives
but to imagine them,
I will say it is
in the first gifts of place:

the steep inclines
and country silences
of your boyhood,
the orange-faced narcissi
and the whole length of the Blackwater

strengthening our embrace.

—Eavan Boland

Reeve Paralysis Foundation, a member of the scientific steering committee of the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research, and president-elect of the Society for Neuroscience, among many similar positions. He is on the editorial board of scientific publications ranging from the *Journal of Comparative Neurology* to *Research and Perspectives in Alzheimer's Disease*. Gage's curriculum vitae lists two hundred and ninety-seven scientific articles, and it isn't even up to date. In comparison with Gould's lab, where just five or six scientists work closely together, Gage's laboratory at Salk is a vast scientific field house, with revolving teams of researchers pursuing dozens of projects.

Gage is accomplished, but he is also well known for being well known. When I was in La Jolla one day and was introduced as a reporter to a Salk researcher, she said, "Oh, then you must be here to see Fred Gage." A rangy man with thinning sandy hair and a mustache on the verge of drooping, he has the manner of a mellow Californian. Gage grew up in Rome, and he is a descendant of Phineas Gage, who, in 1848, was a foreman on a railway-construction crew

in Cavendish, Vermont. One day, an explosion shot a thirteen-pound tamping spike into his skull and out again, ending up twenty-five yards away after running through his brain. Gage didn't die or even become permanently incapacitated, but his personality changed completely (and not for the better). The accident turned him into the most famous brain patient in American history.

In the nineteen-eighties, Fred Gage lived for several years in Lund, Sweden, where he worked with the scientist Anders Björklund on some of the earliest fetal-cell-transplant approaches to treating Parkinson's. Fetal cells are flexible because they have not yet fully developed, and it was widely hoped that, once implanted in the brain, they would be able to "train themselves" to become the type of neurons that fail in Parkinson's patients. By the beginning of the eighties, experiments at Lund and at the Karo-

linska Institute, in Stockholm, had demonstrated that fetal-tissue grafts could replace cells that were destroyed by Parkinson's and other diseases, like juvenile diabetes, and that in many cases the grafts could restore the lost functions, at least temporarily. Yet there have always been doubts that placing the cells into such highly organized and established circuitry would work. One recent study has been particularly discouraging, suggesting that transplanted cells, while capable of surviving, and even adapting to their new surroundings, may actually be able to hijack the brain, becoming uncontrolled and malevolent.

Fetal-tissue research had obvious implications, though, and the work set Gage, and scores of other scientists, on a quest: How could you program cells in the brain so that they develop normally when other cells start to fail? Stem cells, which are created at the earliest stages of embryonic development, seem to provide an answer. (Stem-cell science often employs frozen embryos left over from in-vitro fertilization, and the field has become the most recent battlefield in the war over abortion. Within the next few weeks, the Bush Administration is expected to decide whether to allow scientists to continue using public funds for such research.) A week doesn't pass without encouraging reports of the potential for stem cells to treat any number of diseases. Stem cells can mature into almost every type of cell a human needs, and the most promising results have come with cells taken from the brain. If neuroscientists can make cells, particularly new neurons, grow in adult brains, they should, in theory, be able to find ways of getting them to emerge at the right time in the right places. That has already proved possible in animals. One Italian researcher, Angelo Vescovi, after extracting just a few stem cells from the brain of a healthy mouse, can now routinely grow the equivalent of several brains' worth of tissue in laboratory dishes.

Gage performed experiments that demonstrated that age affects the production of new neurons in rats, and he also showed that if a mouse has regular exercise—something as simple as running on a device that looks like a miniature Ferris wheel—the number of new neurons will increase. Rodents are not humans, though, and Rakic's theory that



adult neurogenesis is likely to play a diminished role in advanced animals was not encouraging. It was hard to know how to test humans, since researchers cannot sacrifice them or take slices from their brains to study under a microscope. In 1998, though, Gage and his colleagues at Salk, along with a team from Sahlgrenska University Hospital, in Sweden, managed to use an approach that had initially been suggested by Michael Kaplan in 1982. It was the last piece of the neurogenesis puzzle, and in many ways the most vital.

Gage's team knew that many cancer patients receive injections of a chemical marker, bromodeoxyuridine, or BrdU, which allows cancer specialists to assess how many new cells are being born. Since BrdU attaches itself to every new dividing cell, and not just to those with cancer, Gage's team realized that it could also reveal whether new neurons are being formed. Gage and his group studied five people between the ages of fifty-seven and seventy-two who had cancer of the throat or the larynx. After the patients died, the researchers looked for BrdU in several sections of their brains, and found that primitive neural stem cells had divided and created from five hundred to a thousand new cells each day. "All of the patients showed evidence of recent cell division," Gage said at the time. "It's interesting to note this was not a particularly young or healthy group of people, so new cell growth may usually be even more prominent than we observed."

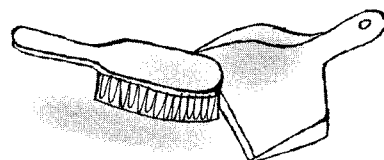
Gage's study had just five patients, a number that could not support definitive conclusions. But the Gage paper, when added to the earlier primate work of Gould (and also to that of Rakic, who in 1998 reported seeing new neurons in rhesus monkeys), unleashed a flood of research, political maneuvering, and idle speculation. The implications were too promising to ignore. Neither Gage nor Gould is a clinician; their job is to figure out the fundamental principles of science. Still, each receives scores of messages a month from people who wonder whether there is a magical elixir that can reverse a stroke or save somebody they love from a deadly neurological condition. At least one medical group has promoted its ability to grow human stem cells in laboratory dishes and transplant them into the brain of a sick person.

"It's absolutely heartbreaking," Gage told me. "I get these E-mails asking whether people should spend fifty thousand dollars on this stuff. And it's just theft. We are a long way from that kind of treatment, and I can't give anybody any reason to hope for what may never happen. On the other hand, I am not frightened to admit that I believe this information is going to be useful to sick human beings. How soon, or for what specific conditions, I cannot say. But I really do believe that this will eventually work."

We had been sitting in Gage's study, above his lab at Salk. His phone there only dials out; it's the one place where he can escape the frenzied research he directs. Outside the window, across the hills, the sky above the Pacific was filled with the Mylar sails of hang gliders. "It's astounding, and as we learn more about basic biology we are going to be able to take these stem cells and reproduce the steps inside them and make them behave in a specific way," he told me. "It's very complicated, but you have to remember one thing: the embryo does it. It develops the whole system. So if we can learn how the embryo does it we can make something fairly similar to what is lost in certain illnesses. And when we do that we are in business."

One morning last winter, I drove up to Rockefeller University's Center for Field Research to see Fernando Nottebohm and his birds. The center—a cluster of austere farm buildings not far from Poughkeepsie—is an estate that was bequeathed to the university in 1971. For many years, Nottebohm shared it with two senior colleagues. These days, behavioral science is not in vogue, and nobody uses the place except him and his lab mates. A foot of snow had fallen the night before I arrived, and the place was silent. As I left my car, however, I heard a muted whirring in the distance; it sounded like an electrical appliance. By the time I reached the main house, the whirring had turned into the rising crescendo of birdsong.

This is where Nottebohm and Ofer



Tchernichovski, who is an assistant professor at Rockefeller, and their colleague Thierry Lints are trying to create the first detailed molecular map of how a bird's brain changes as it learns to sing. Nottebohm and his team are now studying how the brain changes physically—including an analysis of which genes are affected and in what way—every time a young bird opens its mouth.

The lab is filled with sensitive recording equipment, thousands of gigabytes of computing power, stacks of compact disks onto which tens of thousands of birdsongs have been recorded, and a few dozen Igloo beer coolers, which Tchernichovski has transformed into soundproof booths for baby birds. There are also a thousand bright-yellow canaries, and fourteen hundred zebra finches each no bigger than a child's fist. Many of the birds live in room-size cages filled with trees and a long cuttlebone, on which they can sharpen their beaks.

There is no other research facility in America like the field center. "People are not using birds in scientific research now," Nottebohm said, as we stomped through snowdrifts between his office and one of the main houses. "Behaviorists love rats. They can watch them run the mazes; it gives them lots of numbers. That's the American approach, because Americans believe, above all, in statistics. There is also this feeling that mice and rats are like little people."

"But I look at it in a different way," he continued. "What kinds of things do animals do in their natural circumstances, what kind of problems do they have, and how do they solve them? For a brain scientist like me, that is a much nicer approach, because brains are not all-purpose machines. They have evolved to deal with specific existential problems: How do you make it through a year with all kinds of different seasons? How do you claim and defend a territory? How do you find a mate? How do you look after your offspring? How do you remember where you hid your seeds?"

That, of course, is the leitmotif of Nottebohm's career: you can understand how animals behave, and how their brains function, only if you watch them live normally. It has been Nottebohm's singular perception that behavioral analysis alone would never explain how birds learn to sing, and that just examining

the molecular basis of the cells won't do it, either. "Unless you understand the needs, the habits, the problems of an animal in nature, you will not understand it at all," he said. "Put rats and mice into little plastic boxes and you will never fully comprehend why they do what they do. Take nature away and all your insight is in a biological vacuum."

With help from Bell Laboratories, Tchernichovski, a transplanted Israeli with a first-rate ear and a deep knowledge of computers, designed a program that takes control of what a bird can learn and traces it by the second. First, he built a sophisticated sound system into a five-dollar plastic model of a bird, "the type you put on a Christmas tree," he told me. When the baby birds are thirty days old, the researchers place them in a cooler with the plastic father, which is perched in the center of what is essentially a tiny recording studio. The chicks respond immediately to its songs. They quickly get used to the plastic bird. Two big red keys are at the back of the cooler, and it doesn't take long for a young bird to realize that it can make the plastic model sing by pecking on the keys. The computer registers every move the bird makes, recording how many notes it sings, how often it pecks the keys, the exact composition of each song, and the vocal register the bird uses. The system then analyzes every note.

Tchernichovski whistled a bit of Gershwin. The computer immediately recorded his version of "Rhapsody in Blue," analyzed the vocal patterns, the notes, the syllables, and the timing. Suddenly, the plastic bird in the middle of the cage is singing Gershwin. "If we wanted to, we could then have the young bird learn that song," he told me with a big smile, since Gershwin is a bit too complex for a songbird to master. Birds learn to sing by the time they are two months old, but it has never been possible to understand the process very well. What is learned and what is programmed from birth? The computer system has finally permitted the team to try to provide an answer.

"Now, if we want to say a certain note was learned at a certain instant, we can take the bird and sacrifice it the second we see him learn that note," Nottebohm said. "Then we can look at what genes are expressed and what cells are there in



"Why do I need to go to Europe when Europe is here?"

the brain. We will literally be able to pull those cells out of the brain and say, 'How have you changed the way your genes work?' That is something we will need to know if we are ever going to program the brain to make up for its problems."

Nottebohm is delighted—up to a point—to see that Gage and Gould, as well as experts at the National Institutes of Health and in every major center of science, are now fully engaged in the field that for so long was his alone. He told me more than once—never sourly—that he was surprised by how little publicity Rockefeller sought for his research. Neurogenesis is hardly ever mentioned in the university's brochures, and that also surprises him. "I have always had a passion for clinical relevance,"

Nottebohm told me as we strolled from one room filled with canaries to the next. "I wanted to discover lovely basic things and I wanted to listen to the music of the birds. But there is so much suffering out there, and it would be so nice to have a solution. Yet I have to admit it's not quite as exciting for me as it was. For so long, this field was my backwater, my sandbox. And I enjoyed it. I saw Eric Kandel"—his friend who had just won the Nobel Prize—"not long ago, and he said, 'You must be so happy that all the things you said turned out to be true,' and of course I am. But, honestly, it used to be much more fun when nobody believed it. In science, by the time everybody tells you it's true you have to scratch your head and look for another business." ♦



In the kitchen, Sottha Khunn's mother said, "I wonder if food tastes like he remembers, or if he doesn't remember, or if the cooking chan

HOME FOR DINNER

A leading chef tries to reconcile himself to the past with one perfect meal.

BY MOLLY O'NEILL

One morning last winter, Sottha Khunn—the chef whose fourteen-year reign at Le Cirque earned him international fame and a four-star rating from the *Times*—sat on his mother's terrace in Cambodia, wearing Yves Saint Laurent boxer shorts and peeling mangoes. It was not yet 5 A.M., the temperature was already ninety degrees, and the landscape was silent and still, as if swept by a hurricane that had long since moved on. Below, in the predawn light, was a jungle of a garden and a high locked gate; the trees that fringed the scrubby field across the road were violet silhouettes.

In each mango, Sottha made a shallow incision and pulled upward, lifting rather than slicing away the blushing green skin. Over the years, as Sottha has evolved from a staunch French classicist to one of the leading architects of East-meets-West cuisine, I've watched him hacking and mincing meat, fish, vegetables, and fruit for hundreds of hours. Even so, the sound of the mango skin ripping away from the fruit's flesh was unsettling. Every few moments, he would glance at me over the top of his graphite-framed half-glasses, and I wondered what he was thinking.

I had interviewed Sottha dozens of times for stories about food and culture, but it took a decade before he allowed a careful, familial sort of friendship to take root between us. He likes to communicate by innuendo and metaphor, especially food metaphor, and his French-accented English rushes along in Khmer cadence. I have developed the habit of first deciphering the words, considering the context, and then repeating back to him what I think he's saying. Once, he told me that I was like his "see-key-a-tree," or "psychiatrist." "You say what I think," he said.

Several months earlier, facing his fiftieth birthday, Sottha had abruptly resigned from Le Cirque, and turned down

book deals, television opportunities, and job offers that would have tripled his income. He announced that, after twenty-seven years in the diaspora, he was going home—back to Siem Reap, the town in Cambodia where he had grown up. "Maybe for three months," he'd told me, "maybe for good." Every time I asked him to explain his plans, he offered a different scenario. At first, he thought he might open a school to train chefs, or a restaurant to attract tourists: "Before I die, I wish to make something for Cambodia." Later he said, "I want to give my mother some happiness before she dies, help her finish the house, maybe cook for her one perfect meal. Better than sending orchids to the funeral." He also said that he'd reached a creative impasse in the kitchen. "I can play any note that anyone has ever played, and I can play it perfectly, but still I am missing a note," he said. "Maybe I know it and I forget. Maybe I never know it."

One particular dish—sea bass steamed over a broth of lemongrass and *galangal* (a gingerlike root), thickened with butter and enlivened with chopped tomatoes, chives, and basil—had become the emblem of his frustration. He worked and reworked the dish, and it earned him critical praise, but he felt that some minute calibration between sweet and sour continued to elude him. "Not yet the perfect balance, the sensation that lets the customer taste the world as I taste it," he said.

Sottha never told me that he was going home for himself. Instead, he turned to me the night before he left Manhattan and said, "I am going home for mango season. How can I explain it to you unless you come and taste?"

Sottha's bearing, his manners, and his acute sense of society's appetites had long distinguished him in professional kitchens, but his origins have always

*nuse we change."*

ILLUSTRATION BY JACQUES DE LOUSTAL

been mysterious. People assumed that he was wellborn and escaped by luck the nightmare that had befallen his country—that he had spent decades working sixteen-hour days to avoid looking back. But he has always discouraged direct questions about his past. “There are seven million Cambodian stories,” he once told me. “I am only one, and not such an interesting one.”

In 1998, Sottha returned to Cambodia for the dedication of his father’s *stupa*, a burial monument, and saw his mother briefly, but he was so undone by the disappearance of the country he had known that he took the next available flight back. I thought he was crazy when he started talking about going home for an extended stay—maybe even forever. I also thought his invitation, which had sounded almost like a challenge, was really a plea: he wanted a witness.

By the time I joined him in Siem Reap for my mango lesson, Sottha had been home for several weeks, long enough to feel exposed. “You will taste each one—more sweet, less sweet, and more less sweet,” he said, cutting fat slices from each of the three mangoes. “That way, you know the whole story, always by

contrast.” There are, he explained, three kinds of mangoes in Cambodia. The flesh of the cheapest and most common is gaudy orange, fibrous, and cloyingly sweet. A midrange mango is the color of monks’ robes—a dusty orange-gold. It is sweet, too, but there are slivers of sour running through it, like ice. In the rarest, most expensive mango, sweetness is balanced by spicy, musky, and tart flavors, and its flesh is smooth and creamy, the color of the gold moon. Here, sweetness is a respite from sour—a concept that looms large in the Cambodian imagination.

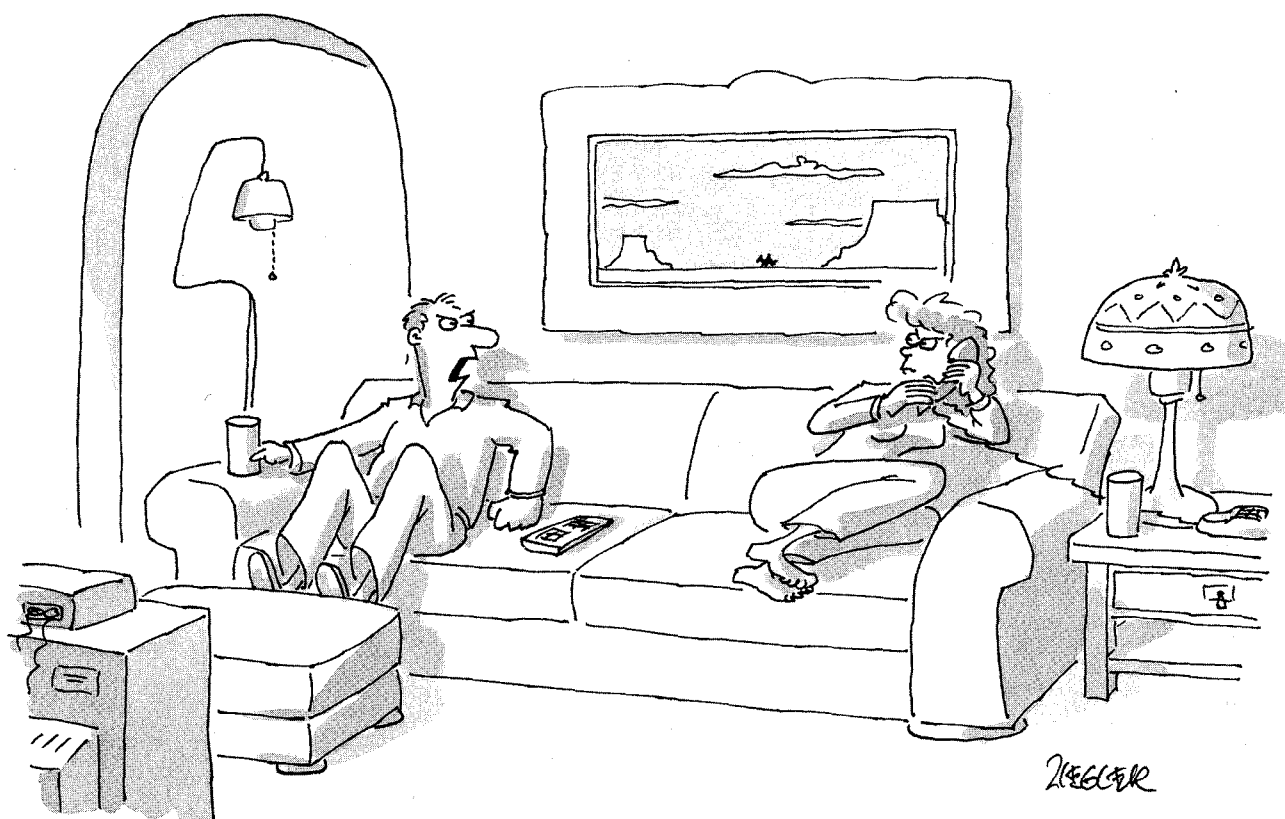
“You see?” he said, staring at me. “Once you taste the perfect taste, just once you taste it. And you spend your whole life looking for it again. But you can never find it, never. The chef, he works like an animal to make one perfect taste, and when he does it break his heart, because he no can make it again, ever. But the chef, he can’t stop himself, he keeps looking and looking, he will do anything to find that one perfect taste again.”

Most mornings, I sat on the second-floor terrace of Sottha’s family home and watched signs of Cambodia’s past and its future slide by. Peasants ped-

alled toward the market on wobbly old bicycles loaded with foraged firewood, roots, and greens. Entire families were crammed onto Honda Dream motorcycles, ferrying children to school. Men who’d lost their legs in land-mine explosions scooted by on wheeled wooden platforms, heading to the center of town, where they would beg, like the skinny barefoot children who ambled along the apron of the road. Tour buses zoomed by, chasing sunrise to the ruins at Angkor Wat.

As many as a hundred thousand people live in Siem Reap, which is situated in northwestern Cambodia. The town is anchored at its southerly tip by the Tonle Sap, one of the largest freshwater lakes in the world, and at its northeastern end by Angkor, the ruins of a vast temple complex built between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries, when the Khmer Empire encompassed Myanmar, Thailand, and much of Laos, Vietnam, and the Malay Peninsula. Since then, Cambodia has shrunk from being the cultural center of Southeast Asia to its Poland: a buffer state between its more powerful neighbors Thailand and Vietnam.

The Khunn family accumulated rice



“Hey! Pay-per-view here, if you and your mother don’t mind!”

fields for five generations before Sottha was born, in 1951. During his childhood, he said, “past glory still justified everything, the very existence of the country, the way things were done.” The division between rich and poor was severe, and, like other children of privilege in the nineteen-sixties, Sottha spent as much of his adolescence railing against the inequities of Cambodian society as he did absorbing the ornate mores and closely circumscribed expectations that he was born to. He was a graduate student in Paris in 1975, when the Khmer Rouge—originally led by a band of educated and privileged idealists—succeeded in toppling Cambodia’s royalist government. Like most Cambodians, the few members of Sottha’s extended family who survived Pol Pot’s regime spent the next two decades attempting to rebuild their lives. The family home, a spare two-story white stucco house that is a replica of the one that was destroyed in the war, sits on the small square of land that was restored to the family in 1995. Sottha’s savings helped rebuild the house; his mother, Long Sovann Khunn, supports herself by running it as a bed-and-breakfast (by invitation only).

In a month of travelling throughout the country and interviewing diplomats, international relief workers, and Cambodians from the diaspora who have returned, I found that the elite class had not disappeared with the war; its composition had simply changed. Today, government officials control the bulk of the country’s wealth. Most Cambodians are subsistence farmers, and widespread corruption—from the greedy bureaucrats to the woefully underpaid teachers who sell test answers to their students in order to feed their own children—is hobbling the economy. At the same time, a new middle class and a vibrant tourism industry have taken root: hotels are altering the skylines; restaurants are crowded; and the roads are clogged with small motorbikes and old Toyotas. In the evening, new televisions blue the windows of private homes. Many Cambodians were eager to discuss these changes, but Sottha was not. “I am a cook, not a politician,” he said. Instead, he sought to make sense of Cambodia’s changes through the idiom of taste.

Sottha and I spent as much time as his mother would allow in her kitchen, a

long breezeway that flanks one end of her home. There he studied the ingredients that shape the sweet, sour, salty, and bitter notes in Khmer cuisine. He parsed the various sweet tones in curry, banana, sugar, and mango; he contemplated the difference between salt, soy, the fish sauce called *tik trei*, the more intense fermented paste called *prahok*, and the distinct sorts of bitter heat from herbs and wild greens. The sourness of lemongrass as opposed to that of tamarind, young pineapple, lime, vinegar, green mango, and papaya occupied him for hours. Cambodian cooking is the subtlest cuisine in Southeast Asia: less sweet and spicy than Thai cuisine, less bitter and salty than Vietnamese. The Khmer dishes his mother cooked were brighter, sourer than he’d remembered.

For lunch and dinner every day, Mme. Khunn prepared a multicourse meal, alternating, in accordance with Cambodian tradition, solid and liquid, cooked and raw. She made tiny spring rolls stuffed with crab, frogs stuffed with minced pork and lemongrass, curried fish, stir-fried fish with bamboo and water lilies. She made pork stewed in caramelized palm sugar, peppered beef with peanuts, and stir-fried chicken with pea-size eggplants. She made vegetable broth with banana blossoms and fish balls, and pork broth soured with tamarind, thickened slightly with rice starch, and chock full of tiny shrimp and greens. She viewed the food she cooked for her firstborn as a mother’s conversation with an amnesiac. She often spoke about Sottha—usually within his hearing. “I wonder if food tastes like he remembers,” she said to me one day, “or if he doesn’t remember, or if the cooking changes because we change.”

Mme. Khunn is sixty-eight years old, short and plump. She wears a house-dress in the kitchen, quickly wrapping a sarong around her waist when anyone enters. She keeps her hair black, and wears it short. Her face is angular, ruddy, typically Khmer; Sottha, like his late father, looks more Chinese—paler, smoother, rounder. Like many Cambodians, Mme. Khunn sees her life in three frames: before Pol Pot, during Pol Pot, and after Pol Pot. Before Pol Pot, she had married well, and—like all women of her status—she’d become a connoisseur of high Khmer culture: its ballet, its music,

its traditional palace cuisine. But, instead of attending her mother-in-law, as tradition dictated, she devoted herself to public service and the arts, learning French, English, Russian, and Vietnamese along the way. Sottha’s mother was glamorous; she was also a distant and distracted parent, entrusting her children to nannies, relatives, and French private schools.

By 1974, when she sent Sottha to graduate school in Paris, the ranks of the Khmer Rouge had been growing for more than a decade. The rebels, who lived in training camps in the jungle, were becoming increasingly violent and difficult to ignore. That year, they had taken over dozens of provincial villages throughout the country, and were poised to march on Phnom Penh. But the Khunns, like many Cambodians, never imagined that a revolution led by children of privilege could end up destroying their world. Then, in the spring of 1975, a few months after Sottha’s father died, of a heart attack, the Khmer Rouge invaded Siem Reap. Along with the rest of the town’s inhabitants, Sottha’s mother, brothers, and sister were ordered from their home and marched north into the jungle. Mme. Khunn’s parents and brothers died along the road. At the end of the march, her eighteen-year-old son was caught eating a foraged yam, and to avoid the punishment—typically evisceration—for “greed,” he committed suicide. Her two youngest sons and her seven-year-old daughter were sent to the countryside to herd cattle. Mme. Khunn spent the next four years clearing land, building huts, and tending to bands of other people’s children.

Now, twenty-six years later, she was swaying in the hammock in her kitchen, peeling shallots, looking more like a peasant than a former grande dame. She lost a second son in an accident in 1998, but her son Thony and his wife live with her and help maintain the house; her daughter, Mum, visits regularly from Phnom Penh; and her firstborn son has finally come home.

Like Sottha, Mme. Khunn frequently communicates in metaphor, stories, and innuendo. Before taking up her shallots, for instance, she showed me photographs of Angkor Wat, pointed out how Buddhist characteristics had been applied to earlier Hindu images, and then, with a meaningful glance, asked me to



"Oh, can't complain."

taste the soup she was making. In the nineteenth century, the Sanskritist Émile Senart wrote about Cambodia's tendency to "submerge deep differences inside surface similarities," and noted that even the evolution of its religion was a process of layering. Likewise, in the Khmer kitchen, elements from Java, Malaysia, China, Thailand, and Vietnam were added to the Indian foundation, deepening, rather than changing, the basic balance of sweet, salty, sour, and bitter. The daily pounding of lemongrass, *galangal*, turmeric, garlic, and shallots in a mortar and pestle to create *kroeung*, the spice paste that is the foundation of most dishes, is an indication of how seriously melding and fusing continue to be taken in Cambodia.

Sottha argues that the fact that *kroeung* is made for each meal, instead of in large weekly batches, reflects another Cambodian characteristic. The Cambodian, he said, "doesn't think ahead. He never had to. When he is hungry, he reaches up to the tree for fruit, into the water for fish, and he eats what he gets." Sottha was standing over a box of huge hard-shell crabs on the ceramic tile floor of the kitchen.

"Not true, Sottha," said his mother, who, having finished the shallots, had moved from the hammock to a grass mat on the floor to begin pounding the paste for lunch. She argued that the paste was made fresh because one dish

might need more lemongrass while another might need more shallots or garlic. Sottha didn't point out that small portions from a large batch could be tailored for each dish. He smiled at his mother, and shook his head at me.

"He's been away too long," Mme. Khunn muttered. "He doesn't remember." She rose to stir the *kroeung* into a pork broth with tamarind and *prahok*.

The kitchen smelled like the muddy banks of the Tonle Sap when the day's catch is drying and women are squatting around small three-legged stoves, simmering what they've caught and foraged. Most Cambodians live on a diet of rice with modest amounts of fish and vegetables, whereas Mme. Khunn cooked high Khmer cuisine for her visiting son. Even so, her kitchen smelled like everyone else's, and she was proud of it. "Since Pol Pot, I don't cook French," she said.

French cuisine is, perhaps, the only cuisine introduced to Cambodia that has never fused with Khmer cooking. It remained separate and was, until recently, a gold standard—the food of the elite. Now, however, after a war that all but destroyed Cambodian high culture, knowledge of the ornate traditions of Khmer cuisine has become more precious. King Norodom Sihanouk is still proud of his French cooking, but Mme. Khunn and her two best friends, Luk Mei Tioulong and Paula Prem, are as obsessed with

Khmer cuisine as conservation groups have become with Cambodia's vanishing forests. For Mme. Khunn, cooking is not simply making a meal; it is a way of passing along an endangered tradition. Frowning at the crabs on her kitchen floor, she said that it was already too late to reverse some of the ways that Khmer customs had changed in her lifetime.

Cambodian Buddhists are not prohibited from eating flesh; they just aren't supposed to kill for it—which created a tradition of hypocrisy in the markets. For instance, before Pol Pot, a Buddhist Cambodian woman might admire a fish in the market by saying "Too bad it is still alive," and continue walking until the fishmonger, who was invariably Vietnamese, caught up with her and announced that the fish had just died. During Pol Pot, when people survived on insects, snakes, paddy rats, and birds, the prohibition against slaughter largely disappeared. But some, like Mme. Khunn, would no more kill a crab for dinner than they would forget to make morning offerings. Her son assured her that he would execute the crabs. "Don't worry," he said. "I already killed a million lobsters. What's twelve more crabs?"

His war had been different.

Sottha was planning to earn his doctorate in economics when he left Siem Reap for Paris on September 6, 1974. He'd grown up on Evian water, *pommes de terre dauphinoise*, and *filet de sole à la bonne femme*, he said, and he felt at home in France. When his father died, it was already too dangerous for Sottha to return for the funeral. In April of 1975, Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge. "At first I thought it was a joke, or they made a mistake," Sottha recalled. "How could the Communists come to Cambodia when all our lives we pray to the Buddha?" Unable to pay for school, Sottha rented a tiny studio in the Twelfth Arrondissement, and a family friend in Paris helped him secure an apprenticeship at Maison Prunier, then a fashionable restaurant with two Michelin stars. He'd never cooked a thing. "When I was little, I watched my mother's parties. Watching, watching. Always I was asking for a taste, but never, ever could I have that," he said. "I figured I could learn cooking, and, besides, what other job is a Chinese going to get in Paris?"

Sottha hunted for news of home—reading four newspapers a day, trading scraps of information with other members of the large expatriate Cambodian community, and frequently visiting a distant cousin who owned a television. He assumed that his family was dead, and lost himself in the sweaty trenches of restaurant kitchens, where the unceasing demands of the moment obscured the past. Every day, Sottha said, was like a war. “The orders attack you, the chef attacks you, you sweat, and you fear one mistake. You must become a machine or you are dead.”

It takes about ten years to become a chef—to master the ways of a knife, the inner life of ingredients, and the vicissitudes of heat, and then to hone this knowledge until it lives in the hands, like a musician’s response to notes on a page. Sottha spent four of those years at Maison Prunier, working twelve-hour days, except on Mondays, when he slept and read cookbooks. He also made a weekly pilgrimage to Fauchon, the exclusive grocery store in Paris, to look in the window.

“I stared and stared at the mangoes, so expensive I could not buy them, so I try to imagine them, but soon I forget,” he said. “My happiness became cooking. I put my life there.” In that period, he began listening to Mozart and Beethoven. “I understood that the meal is a symphony and that I was young, just learning the notes.” He continued his apprenticeship with Alain Senderens, who helped create nouvelle cuisine, spending a year at his restaurant L’Archestrate, which had three Michelin stars. He spent the next year at Troisgros, another Michelin three-star restaurant, in Roanne. Then, in 1980, Sottha received a letter that his mother had slipped to an American journalist. A Vietnamese-backed invasion had toppled Pol Pot, and she’d been sent home to Siem Reap and made the general manager of the Grand Hôtel d’Angkor; she did all the cooking, cleaning, and laundry in the luxury establishment where she’d once entertained. Sottha’s three surviving siblings were in a group home nearby.

There was still no mail service in Cambodia, so Sottha couldn’t respond. But by 1981 hints of Southeast Asia were surfacing in his cooking. Named executive sous-chef to Alain Passard at

Duc d’Enghien, a restaurant eight miles north of Paris, he began to use wonton wrappers to make crabmeat ravioli, which he served in a ginger broth. He also began to use exotic fruits and to infuse sweet syrups with lemongrass for desserts. The restaurant earned two Michelin stars in 1983. The following year, Sottha was recruited by Daniel Boulud, another prodigy of French cooking, to help open the dining room at the Hôtel Plaza Athénée, in Manhattan. “I put the salt, and Daniel put the pepper,” Sottha recalled. “We are like one mind, one person, one taste.” Two years later, the French chef and his Cambodian sous-chef took over the kitchen at Le Cirque and began creating modern classics: sea bass wrapped in parchment-thin potatoes, scallops “black tie” (studded with black truffles). By the time I met Sottha, in 1991, he was midway through his second decade, the time when a chef’s personal style usually begins to emerge. In Sottha’s case, I could taste the East in his Western cooking, but just barely; his effort to create a distinct signature was still tentative. But he had become a master at pleasing people.

During every meal at Le Cirque, Sottha would stand in the kitchen in his well-starched white jacket, as compact as a major-league catcher directing the game from behind home plate. As the waiters rushed in to report on the personages seated in the dining room, Sottha would instantly connect the names with what he had read or heard of each diner’s tastes, dietary concerns, and self-image, and signal his staff to cook accordingly. Intuitively, he knew to order deeper exotic seasoning and a vivid, spare presentation for the self-consciously hip, and then, imagining the same dish for a self-made mogul, to order subdued seasoning, a more bountiful look, and the addition of obvious luxury—a hillock of beluga, for instance, or a palisade of shaved white truffle.

He lived a monastic life in New York, working twelve to fourteen hours almost every day. In 1994, he bought a tiny co-op on the Upper East Side, where he listened to Beethoven, polished his small collection of Cambodian silver boxes, tended orchids, and doted on Ted, his Bichon Havanais. Then Sottha was given an opportunity



“Used to do that myself. Made out like a bandito.”

to define his cuisine. Boulud had resigned from Le Cirque, in 1993, to open Daniel, and Sottha initially declined to take his place, preferring to remain a sous-chef. But in 1996, when Le Cirque closed at its original location, the owner, Sirio Maccioni, persuaded Sottha to accept the position of executive chef, offering him a year to help design the restaurant's new kitchen and menu. Sottha continued to talk about his job as if it were a war, but, instead of fearing death at the hands of an exacting chef, now he was terrified of food critics.

A week before Le Cirque was scheduled to reopen, Sottha's dishes tasted perfect to me but not to him. His frustration was apparent as he sat with two assistants in the restaurant's lower level, behind the glass wall of its humid room, making the final selection of dishes that would appear on his first

menu. "They're going to kill me," he muttered. "Just waiting to kill me." I'd written "Losing it" in my notebook when there was a thundering explosion, and the four of us dove under the table amid a cascade of glass. The wall behind us, improperly installed, had shattered. "What I tell you?" Sottha said to me.

After that, Sottha started talking less about aesthetics and more about himself, although always indirectly. He first alluded to his nationality by telling me his response upon hearing that Henry Kissinger had been seated in the restaurant. "I couldn't cook," he said. (Kissinger's extensive bombing of Cambodia in 1973 had helped pave the way for Pol Pot.) "But after the first time," he continued, "no problem. Mr. Kissinger is a man of taste."

At Le Cirque, Sottha was fascinated by the pathos of his wealthy customers'

lives—the woman who wore a crown to lunch ("Poor thing, I feel so bad, she want to be the queen, and America can give her everything but a throne"), the man who could eat only soft food ("Can you imagine? He have everything, all the money in the world, but no teeth"). "I learned the limits of society, and for me it is the human condition that is more interesting," he said. "I read Molière, so what? What is more interesting is what people have in common—appetite. And, if they are lucky, taste."

He also confessed his weakness for "The King and I," one of the few movies he owns on tape. "I can't help it," he said. "Maybe I watch this video one hundred times." One evening last year, after cajoling me into watching it with him, he described his own background and his deep ambivalence about the world of his parents: "When I was little, my mother had two little white dogs and she loved them more than her children and gave them always steak tartare and Evian and gold collars," he recalled, gasping with laughter. "Then came Pol Pot. And like that, the dogs, they lost everything."

The war's toll on lives and places—and, perhaps equally disturbing, the steady trickling away of the country's resources—was apparent everywhere I went in Cambodia. The hillsides are scarred by illegal logging, and gems and ancient artifacts get spirited out of the country to Thailand, where they are sold, covertly, to Westerners. Sottha, however, showed little reaction to these transgressions and offered little comment. His jaw tightened as we stood in front of a pantheon of headless statuary at Angkor, but when I asked him about the relics trade he did his best to deflect my questions. He encouraged me to consider where Cambodia's treasures might surface: "Garden walls, birdbath, planters in the Hamptons?"

Sottha's friend Lim had joined us for a week of travelling through Cambodia. A robust man with white hair, high energy, and equal measures of joy and righteous indignation, Lim was as direct as Sottha was discreet. One of the few Cambodian friends Sottha had made during his years in exile, Lim hadn't seen his homeland since the nineteen-sixties,



MARISA
ACOCELLA

"What does she do with her life? She's at every party I go to."

when he left for graduate school in the United States. A highly respected chemist who earned his reputation parsing and synthesizing flavors for the food industry, Lim had retired just before accepting Sottha's invitation to visit Siem Reap. The two men spent hours analyzing the ways in which their country's recent history was reflected in its cuisine. One day, we drove from Phnom Penh through the province of Kompot to Kep, a famous old resort town on the Gulf of Thailand. The road was all but impassable, and when Lim wasn't complaining about the lack of clean running water in the impoverished villages, or the freshly lumbered swaths that zigzagged across the Cardamom Mountains, he cheered himself with memories of Kep, a place that both he and Sottha had visited as children, when it was a bustling resort with white villas perched on the hillsides and beaches dense with parasols.

But we arrived in a ghost town. Moss grew on the rubble of once grand homes along the wide boulevards. There were no stores. Two policemen, two scrawny children begging, and a man inexplicably selling stuffed banana leaves were the only signs of life on the crumbling promenade along the beach. Lim collapsed on the first bench he reached. Sottha walked off, returning a few minutes later with a stack of the thin banana-leaf squares.

"Remember *noum sloeuk chek*? We ate so many," Sottha said, sitting down next to Lim. Inside each folded leaf was a thin barbecued rice pancake with coconut cream and black sesame seeds.

"A world disappears," Lim said. "Its snack remains."

"Isn't it amazing," Sottha said, glancing around at the seaside ruins, "how the sweet thing tastes sweeter next to the sour?"

On the way back to Phnom Penh, the two men discussed the difference between bitterness, which eventually numbs one's tongue, and sourness, which lingers in the mouth, changing the way other things taste. We'd planned to stop at a black-pepper plantation after visiting Kep, but Sottha changed the plan. "Too dangerous," he said—a frequent refrain. Although travel in Cambodia can be arduous, tourists are courted and travel is relatively safe. Returning after so many years, however,

Sottha experienced his country as a vast unknown, and became obsessed with the comfort and security of his guests. He discouraged a picnic to the sacred mountain Kulen ("land mines and snakes") and vetoed a proposed trip to the cashew and fruit plantations outside Battambang, citing the possibility of being attacked by bandits. His family laughed at him; after several days, so did his guests. Nevertheless, if someone was five minutes late returning home from an outing, Sottha would pace the terrace of his family's house, chain-smoking menthol Benson & Hedges. On the way back to Phnom Penh as evening fell, he asked each of us, for the fourth time that day, if we had our passports. "You need a passport for Phnom Penh?" I asked. "If something happens, we go directly to Vietnam, directly out of this country," he replied. "My family already learned this lesson."

For many French people, a perfect omelette symbolizes the restrained force and impeccable taste of a self-assured society. *A-mok* represents something similar to Cambodians: the curried-fish custard steamed in banana leaves is testimony to the power of gentleness. The squabbling hot, sweet, salty, and bitter tones in the curried fish are softened and suspended in a harmonious coexistence by the fragile custard.

Lim swooned for Mme. Khunn's *a-mok*, and was not shy about hugging the cook. Every time he ate a meal, he remembered things, he said. This pleased Madame; her own son was courteous and attentive but much more aloof. The memories stirred in Lim, however, were not always comforting. After dinner, as we sat on the terrace in the dimming heat and light, he might praise a meal and then suddenly remember a childhood friend, whose parents couldn't afford to send him to school, watching Lim troop off with his book bag. "It enraged me. I blamed my parents and their world," he said. "It wasn't that we had much, but I hated the society that had anything when most people had nothing—the injustice."

The damp air was sweet with the scent of jasmine and mimosa. Sottha's laugh was a cough in the dark. "We all hated it, a whole generation born rebelling. When the parents send us to the

lycée, we study the French Revolution and we think that's the answer—we must cut off the heads of the rich!"

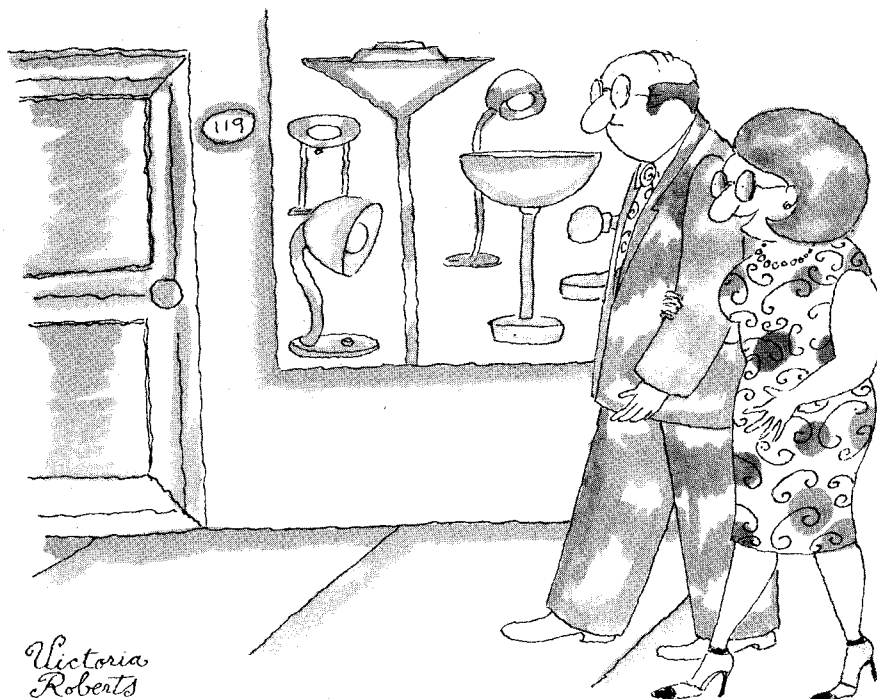
"Some of us who left never changed," Lim replied softly. "If I'd stayed, I'd be dead. I was such a big mouth, it scares me to think what I might have done." He continued, "And I come back, can't remember the language, but that anger, my God—I see the poverty, the corruption, and I'm nineteen years old, still raging."

After Lim left the Khunn household, Sottha ventured from home only to accompany his mother to the market in the morning. In his polo shirt, well-creased Bermuda shorts, and flip-flops, he looked like a foreigner among the squatting vendors. Until he spoke Khmer, they quoted him tourist prices.

"I don't belong here anymore," he said one morning as we rode the mile home from the market in a rickshaw pulled by a motorcycle. He told me about visiting the countryside, and how overwhelmed he'd been by the poverty. "I asked one woman why does she not get a pig—that way, you feed it for six months and you have a lot of food," Sottha recalled. "She tell me, 'I have to feed my children before I can feed a pig,' and I was so ashamed. I was grateful my father died before he hear me say something so stupid." His father had always told him that people had to have food before art. "I am thinking that a restaurant or a cooking school is not right for Cambodia now. People must eat and read before they learn to work in restaurants."

Sottha devoted most of his time to helping his mother in the garden. They spent several days repotting fifty-nine orchids into coconut shells and hanging them on a shaded arbor. From my room on the second floor, I often heard them laughing, slipping from Khmer to French to English as they discussed unfinished details in the house—the drapes needed here, the furniture needed there.

One evening, as we walked through the garden, he named the trees and plants for me: frangipani, yellow oleander, sea hibiscus, queen of the night, gardenia, birds of paradise, Malay apple, lime, guava, longan, durian, jackfruit, and litchi trees. "Can you imagine?" he asked. "In New York, I live on Tylenol for the headache, but here I never take one." He continued, "I think the most important



Victoria
Roberts

"Please, could you lose the hindsight, just for today?"

thing is I give some happiness to my mother." He had begun planning a feast for Mme. Khunn and her friends. "I've cooked for kings and presidents and the Pope but never for my family. Can you imagine that?"

Whatever had begun to melt inside Sottha seized up again when Mme. Khunn's friends Luk Mei Tiouloung and Paula Prem arrived, along with her brother-in-law Chau Sen Cocsal, for the weekend. They set up their table for *bair tong*—a betting game played with ticket-size cards—in the living room as Sottha began his lengthy preparations for the grand meal. Their cackles and shrieks rose above the slapping sound of the cards and drifted into the kitchen as the gamblers competed to see who could tell the most outrageous stories. Sottha poured them coconut water and Evian, smiling politely, and then returned to the kitchen, raising his eyebrows and shaking his head like an impatient adolescent.

"Like my grandmother," he said, "all day long, play *bair tong*, talking, getting massages, one maid doing all the work." And yet there was nothing indolent about the elders, nothing parochial

or self-reverential. Having survived their history, they had earned the right to laugh at it. "We learned, we changed," Mme. Khunn said. "So the past seems very far away."

Mme. Tiouloung had regularly been asked to advise the King on Cambodian traditions and protocol; between vintage tales of philandering husbands and polygamy, she was given to satirizing the manners, style, and personal foibles of Cambodia's current and former elite. Paula Prem had recently begun teaching the classic Khmer palace cuisine in Phnom Penh; her descriptions of educating the culinary illiterate made the others laugh until they cried. Cocsal was also a joker. At ninety-five, he is still the minister of Cambodia's constitution. "If they don't like what I say, what are they going to do?" he said. "Shoot me? Why waste the bullet? I'm going to die soon anyway."

When the conversation drifted from the past to Cambodia's current state of affairs, the four of them would cluck about living in an upside-down world, where royalists are populists and the Communists are making all the money. Occasionally, Mme. Khunn would glance toward the kitchen door and her

friends would lower their voices. "Sottha does not understand," she told me. "He's been away too long."

Something was shaking the chef's usually infallible instinct for the tastes of his diners. The menu he'd planned harked back to the past that his mother and her friends congratulated themselves on having transcended. There was foie gras that he'd carried with him from Manhattan; roasted chickens stuffed with black truffles; roasted beef tenderloin with an old-fashioned Bordelaise sauce; a *gâteau au chocolat*; a fruit tart. "It is what they want," Sottha insisted. He compared it to the way in which the public tends to prefer a composer's early work over his mature art. "None of this I have cooked in twenty years, but what do I care, if it makes them happy?" He allowed only one dish to veer from the old-fashioned French idiom: the sea bass that had confounded him at Le Cirque. "But very subtle," he said. "It has to taste French. If they taste the Asian seasoning, they will think it is not elegant."

In addition to cooking for an audience that existed only in his memory, Sottha was not cooking at the top of his game. His menu was too ambitious for one set of hands, and since early morning he had been grimly efficient, yet his trademark attention to detail was missing. As I helped prepare the tomatoes for the sea bass, for instance, carefully carving the flesh into the minute diamonds I'd seen him create hundreds of times, he said, "Forget the diamonds, what they know? Just rough chop."

His obsessive *finesse* continued to evaporate as the sun got meaner and the amused anticipation at the *bair tong* table grew. The beef, which was tough, should have been marinated, but Sottha shrugged it off. He'd insisted that the bass seasoning be mild yet couldn't stop himself from adding more and more garlic and lemongrass to his olive-oil marinade. He neglected to baste the chickens sufficiently, so that they dried out as they roasted, and he proceeded to overcook most of the vegetables.

Even so, a distinctly French aroma filled the house. The elders kept tiptoeing to the kitchen door for a deeper whiff, beckoning each other to peek at Sottha as he set the dinner table. He used a white linen tablecloth, and wrapped each nap-

kin in a ring of mimosa flowers. The effect was lovely, in a very proper Sixteenth Arrondissement sort of way. As we looked at it together, Mme. Khunn smiled sadly. "Sottha was not here," she whispered. "He is there," and she nodded toward the open door to the next room, where a painting of a young boy with well-combed hair, a bow tie, and an obedient expression hung on the wall. For Sottha, it was as if time had stopped the day he left the country.

I hear Le Cirque is as expensive as Robuchon," Mme. Tioulong said, settling into her seat across from me at the table as Sottha began pouring champagne. "Big bucks," whispered Cocsal, who had also lived in Paris, and was seated to my left. The old man joined the collective *ooh!* when Sottha served the terrine de foie gras with a tiny salad, but then he beckoned for me to lean down so that he could speak into my ear. "Can you eat this for me?" he said. "I'd rather have rice. Rich food keeps me awake." Like everyone at the table, however, he smiled broadly and said "Thank you, just delicious" to the chef when he cleared the plates, with their gently nibbled portions.

"What I tell you," Sottha whispered as he bent to take away my plate, the only empty one at the table. "They love what they remember. They're not going to like the bass—too spicy, too bold. I got carried away."

The dish didn't look bold; it looked innocent. Sottha hadn't added the tomatoes. The butter sauce was light, and its lemony hue, combined with the pale minced chives and wild greens, was almost translucent against the white fish fillets, like refracted sunlight. Without the tomatoes, the sauce was tart and sour, the fish gentle and sweet. The scent of lemongrass erupted like a cheer over the distant, poignant memory of *galangal* and garlic. Sottha had done it: he had found a new balance between East and West.

The room became very quiet. The elders looked at each other as if one of their children had just won the Nobel Prize. Within three minutes, every plate on the table looked as if it had been licked clean. When Sottha saw the empty plates, he understood that he'd seriously misread the crowd. Cocsal lifted his Scotch glass and said, "Bravo!"

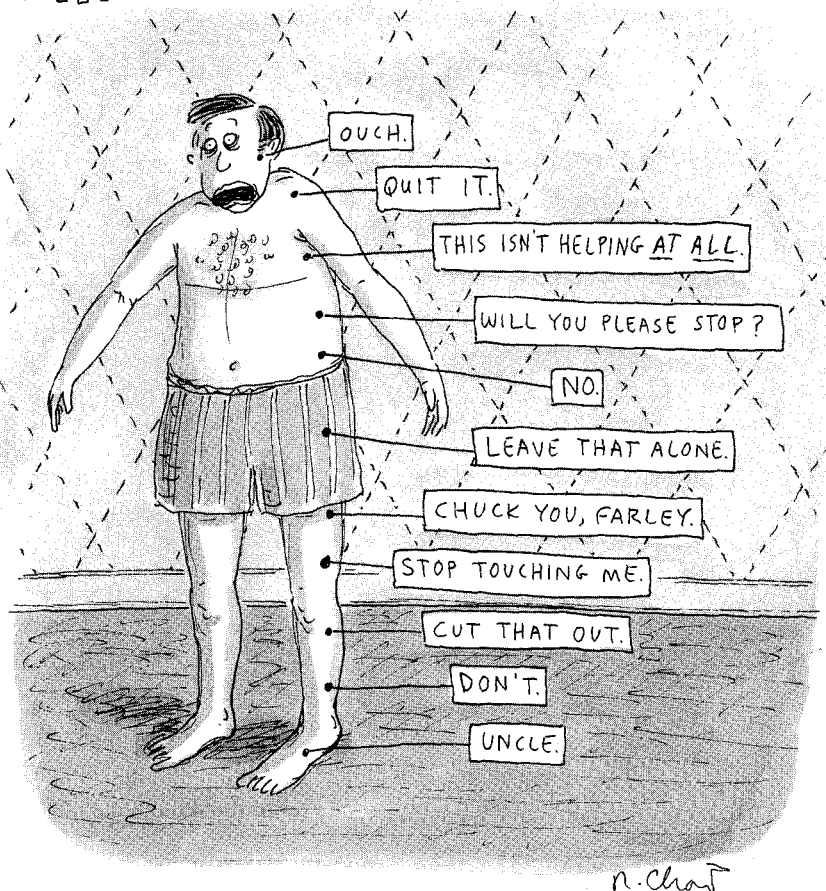
The three Mesdames raised champagne glasses in a babble of "*Cin cin!*" "Cheers!" "*Salut!*" Sottha later told me, "It was at this precise moment that I realize exactly how stupid I am, a slave, all my life, to perfection, and for what? To be always alone? The perfect thing comes like a fortune or a war. You prepare but you never know exactly the day, and only a stupid man stands and waits."

The rest of the meal—by Sottha's standards, anyway—was anticlimactic ("Like the history of Cambodia since the ninth century," Cocsal cheerfully whispered to me). Nobody cared. Sottha brought it to the table, sat down, and ate with us. His fantasy of a formal evening became a family dinner. "What the hell," he said. "Everybody having a good time." Later, when I asked Sottha what had inspired him to leave the tomatoes out of the fish dish, he replied that it had simply been an oversight. But his mother did not agree. "Sottha did not forget the tomatoes," she said as we cleared the table. "He remembered that he did not need them."

After dinner, we sat on the second-floor terrace, and Sottha blasted a recording of Beethoven's Sixth into the navy-blue night. Beneath the music, we could hear the water lapping in an ornamental pool below us as the fish nipped mosquitoes from its surface. Tiny iridescent frogs glowed in the dark, hopping from one lotus leaf to another. "Like that, I feel like I'm finally free," Sottha said softly. "I do everything I should, everybody has some happiness. Now I can do whatever I want."

As to what that might be, the chef didn't have a clue. He thought he'd return to New York, he said, maybe open a sandwich shop: "A good price, a good sandwich—that way I give a little piece of happiness to the maximum number of people, wash my hands, and go home and have a life." But several minutes later he started laughing. "Maybe there is one problem for me about the sandwich shop," he said. "My father always tells me the one born a swan cannot become a duck. Like that, maybe one guy who helps shape the cuisine, he cannot make a sandwich." ♦

INACUPRESSURE POINTS



FICTION

FAMILY FURNISHINGS

BY ALICE MUNRO



Alfrida. My father called her Freddie. The two of them were first cousins and lived for a while on adjoining farms. One day, they were out in the fields of stubble playing with my father's dog, whose name was Mack. The sun was shining but did not melt the ice in the furrows. They stomped on the ice and enjoyed its crackle underfoot.

"How could you remember a thing like that?" my father said. "You made it up."

"I did not."

"You did so."

"I did not."

All of a sudden, they heard bells pealing, whistles blowing. The town bell and the church bells were ringing. The factory whistles were blowing, in the town three miles away. The world had burst its

seams for joy, and Mack tore out to the road, because he was sure a parade was coming. It was the end of the First World War.

Three times a week, we could read Alfrida's name in the paper. Just her first name—Alfrida. It was printed as if written by hand, a flowing fountain-pen signature. Round and About the Town, with Alfrida. The town mentioned was not the one close by but the city to the south, where Alfrida lived, and which my family visited perhaps once every two or three years.

Now is the time for all you future June brides to start registering your preferences at the China Cabinet, and I must tell you that if I were a bride-to-be—which, alas, I am not—I might resist all the patterned dinner sets,

exquisite as they are, and go for the pearly-white, the ultra-modern Rosenthal. . . .

Beauty treatments may come and beauty treatments may go, but the masks they slather on you at Fantine's Salon are guaranteed—speaking of brides—to make your skin bloom like orange blossoms. And to make the bride's mom, and the bride's aunts and, for all I know, her grandmother, feel as if they had just taken a dip in the Fountain of Youth.

You would never have expected Alfrida to write in this style, from the way she talked. She was also one of the people who wrote under the name of Flora Simpson on the Flora Simpson Housewives' Page. Women from all over the countryside believed that they were writing their letters to the plump woman with crimped gray hair and a forgiving smile who was pictured at the top of the page. But the truth—which I was not to tell—

was that the notes responding to each of the letters were produced by Alfrida and a man she called Horse Henry, who also did the obituaries. The women who wrote in gave themselves such names as Morning Star and Lily of the Valley and Little Annie Rooney and Dishmop Queen. Some names were so popular that numbers had to be assigned to them—Goldilocks 1, Goldilocks 2, Goldilocks 3.

"Dear Morning Star," Alfrida or Horse Henry would write. "Eczema is a dreadful pest, especially in this hot weather we're having, and I hope that the baking soda does some good. Home treatments certainly ought to be respected, but it never hurts to seek out your doctor's advice. It's splendid to hear that your hubby is up and about again. It can't have been any fun with *both* of you under the weather."

In all the small towns of that part of Ontario, housewives who belonged to the Flora Simpson Club would hold an annual summer picnic. Flora Simpson always sent her special greetings but explained that there were just too many events for her to show up at all of them, and she did not like to make distinctions. Alfrida said that there had been talk of sending Horse Henry done up in a wig and pillow bosoms, or even Alfrida herself, leering like the witch of Babylon (not even she, at my parents' table, would quote the Bible accurately and say "whore") with a ciggie-boo stuck to her lipstick. "But, oh," she said, "the paper would kill us. And anyway it would be too mean."

She always called her cigarettes "ciggie-boos." When I was fifteen or sixteen, she leaned across the table and asked, "How would you like a ciggie-boo, too?" The meal was finished, and my father had started to roll his own. He shook his head.

I said thank you and let Alfrida light me a cigarette and smoked for the first time in front of my parents. They pretended that it was a great joke.

"Ah, will you look at your daughter?" my mother said to my father. She rolled her eyes and clapped her hands to her chest and spoke in an artificial, languishing voice. "I'm like to faint."

"Have to get the horsewhip out," my father said, half rising in his chair.

This moment was amazing. It was as if Alfrida had transformed us into new

people. Ordinarily, my mother would have said that she didn't like to see a woman smoke. And when she said in a certain tone that she didn't like something, it was as if she were drawing on a private source of wisdom, which was unassailable and almost sacred. It was when she reached for this tone, and the expression of listening to inner voices that accompanied it, that I particularly hated her.

As for my father, he had beaten me, in that very room, not with a horsewhip but with his belt, for running afoul of my mother's rules and wounding her feelings. Now it seemed that such beatings could occur only in another universe.

My parents had been put in a corner by Alfrida—and also by me—but they had responded so gamely and gracefully that it was really as if all three of us, my mother and my father and myself, had been lifted to a new level of ease and aplomb. In that instant, I could see them—particularly my mother—as being capable of a kind of lightheartedness that was hardly ever on view.

All thanks to Alfrida.

In my family, Alfrida was always referred to as a "career girl." This made her seem younger than my parents, though she was about the same age. She was also said to be a city person. And "the city," when it was spoken of in this way, meant the one where she lived and worked. But it meant something else as well. It was not just a distinct configuration of buildings and sidewalks and streetcar lines, or even a crowding together of people; it was something more abstract, something like a hive of bees—stormy but organized, sometimes dangerous. Most people went into such a place only when they had to and were glad when they got out. Some, however, were attracted to it—as Alfrida must have been, long ago, and as I was now, puffing on my cigarette and trying to hold it in a nonchalant way, although it seemed to have grown to the size of a baseball bat between my fingers.

My family did not have a regular social life—friends did not come to the house for dinner, let alone for parties. It was a matter of class, maybe. The parents of the boy I married—about five years after this scene at the dinner table—invited people who were not related to them to dinner, and they went to afternoon parties, which they spoke of, unself-

consciously, as cocktail parties. Theirs was a life I had read of in magazines, and it seemed to me to place my in-laws in a world of storybook privilege.

What our family did was put boards in the dining-room table two or three times a year, in order to entertain my grandmother and my aunts—my father's two older sisters—and their husbands. We did this at Christmas or at Thanksgiving, when it was our turn, and perhaps also when a relative from another part of the province showed up on a visit.

My mother and I would start preparing for such dinners a couple of days ahead. We ironed the good tablecloth, which was as heavy as a bed quilt, and washed the good dishes, which had been sitting in the china cabinet collecting dust, and wiped down the legs of the dining-room chairs, as well as making the jellied salads, the pies and cakes, that had to accompany the roast turkey or baked ham and bowls of vegetables. There had to be far too much to eat, and most of the conversation at the table concerned the food, with the company saying how good it was and being urged to have more, and saying that they couldn't, they were stuffed, and then relenting, taking just a little more, and saying that they shouldn't, they were ready to bust. And dessert still to come.

There was hardly any idea of general conversation, and in fact there was a feeling that conversation that passed beyond certain limits might be a disruption, a form of showing off. My mother's understanding of the limits was not reliable, and she sometimes couldn't wait out the pauses or honor the common aversion to follow-up. So when somebody said, "Seen Harley upstreet yesterday. Harley Cook," she was liable to say, perhaps, "Do you think a man like Harley is a confirmed bachelor? Or he just hasn't met the right person?" As if, when you mentioned seeing Harley Cook, you were bound to have something further to say about him, something *interesting*.

Then there might be a silence, not because the people at the table meant to be rude but because they were flummoxed. Until my father said, with embarrassment and oblique reproach, "He seems to get on all right by hisself." (If his family had not been present, he would more likely have said "himself.")

And everybody else went on cutting, spooning, swallowing, in the glare of the fresh tablecloth and the bright light pouring in through the newly washed windows. These dinners were always in the middle of the day.

The people at that table were quite capable of talk. Washing and drying the dishes in the kitchen, the aunts would talk about who had a tumor, a septic throat, a bad mess of boils. They would tell how their own digestions, kidneys, nerves were functioning. Intimate bodily matters never seemed to be so out of place, or suspect, as the mention of a fact read in a magazine, or an item in the news, or anything, really, that was not material close at hand. Meanwhile, resting on the porch, or during a brief walk out to look at the crops, the aunts' husbands would pass on the information that somebody was in a tight spot with the bank, or still owed money on an expensive piece of machinery, or had invested in a bull that was a disappointment on the job.

It could have been that they felt clamped down by the formality of our dining room, the presence of bread-and-butter plates and dessert spoons, when it was the custom to put a piece of pie right onto a dinner plate that had been cleaned up with bread. (It would have been an offense, however, for us not to set things out in this proper way, and in their own houses, on like occasions, they would put their guests through the same paces.) It may have been just that eating was one thing, and talking was something else.

When Alfrida came it was another story altogether. The good cloth would be spread and the good dishes would be out. My mother would have gone to a lot of trouble with the food, and she'd be nervous about the results—probably she would have abandoned the usual turkey and stuffing and mashed potatoes and made something like chicken salad surrounded by mounds of molded rice with cut-up pimentos, and this would be followed by a dessert involving gelatin and egg whites and whipped cream which took a long, nerve-racking time to set because we had no refrigerator and it had to be chilled on the cellar floor. But the constraint, the required pall over the table, was quite absent. Alfrida not only accepted second helpings, she asked for

them. And she did this almost absent-mindedly, tossing off her compliments in the same way, as if the food, the eating of the food, were a secondary though agreeable thing, and she were really there to talk, and make other people talk, and anything you wanted to talk about—almost anything—would be fine.

She always visited in summer, and usually she wore some sort of striped, silky sundress, with a halter top that left her back bare. Her back was not pretty, being sprinkled with little dark moles, and her shoulders were bony and her chest was nearly flat. My father would always remark on how much she could eat and remain thin. (One thing that was not considered out of place in our family was direct comment, to somebody's face, about fatness or skinniness or pallor or ruddiness or baldness.)

Alfrida's dark hair was done up in rolls above her face and at the sides, in the style of the time. Her skin was freckled and netted with fine wrinkles, and her mouth wide, the lower lip rather thick, almost drooping, painted with a hearty lipstick that left a smear on her teacup and water tumbler. When her mouth was opened wide—as it nearly always was, talking or laughing—you could see that some of her teeth had been pulled, at the back. Nobody would have said that she was good-looking—any woman over twenty-five seemed to me to have pretty well passed beyond the possibility of being good-looking, or, at least, to have lost the right to be so, and perhaps even the desire—but she was fervent and dashing and she lit up a room.

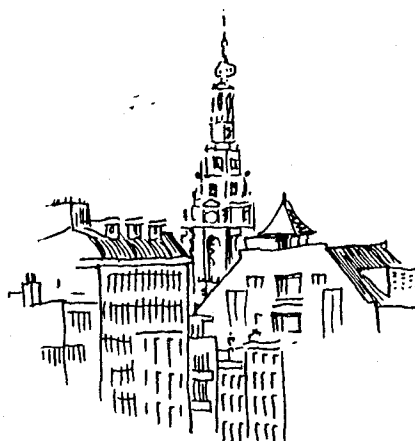
Alfrida talked to my father about things that were happening in the world, about politics. My father read the paper,

he listened to the radio, and he had opinions about these things but rarely got a chance to talk about them. The aunts' husbands had opinions, too, but theirs were brief and unvaried and expressed an everlasting distrust of all public figures and particularly all foreigners, so that most of the time all that could be got out of them were grunts of dismissal. My grandmother was deaf—nobody could tell how much she knew or what she thought about anything—and the aunts themselves seemed fairly proud of how much they didn't know or didn't have to pay attention to. My mother had been a schoolteacher, and she could readily have pointed out all the countries of Europe on the map, but she saw the world through a personal haze, with the British Empire and the Royal Family looming large, and everything else diminished, thrown into a jumble heap that was easy for her to disregard.

Alfrida's views were not really so far removed from the uncles'. Or so it appeared. But, instead of grunting and letting the subject go, she gave her hooting laugh, and told stories about prime ministers and the American President and John L. Lewis and the Mayor of Montreal—stories in which they all came out badly. She told stories about the Royal Family, too, but there she made a distinction between the good ones, like the King and Queen and the beautiful Duchess of Kent, and the dreadful ones, like the Windsors and old King Eddy, who, she implied, had a certain disease and had marked his wife's neck by trying to strangle her, which was why she always had to wear her pearls. This distinction coincided pretty well with one my mother made but seldom spoke of, so she did not object—though the reference to syphilis made her wince.

I smiled at it, knowingly, and with a foolhardy composure.

Alfrida called the Russians funny names. Mikoyan-sky. Uncle Joe-sky. She believed that they were pulling the wool over everybody's eyes, and that the United Nations was a farce that would never work and that Japan would rise again and should have been finished off when there was the chance. She didn't trust Quebec, either. Or the Pope, whom she called "the Poop." And there was a problem for her with Senator McCarthy—she would have liked to be on his side, but his



NOCTURNE

Do our words count so late at night,
this late do even these words count?

In life I was heroic at times, at other
times quiet as a mug of milk.

I saved a man, I swear, but afterward
wherever I walked I saw one drown.

Men cry their names out when they die
and one man as he died cried *Dan*.

Back then I thought the water was air,
I thought the body was a bar of soap.

Other and Other made a ladder and up
to the top I climbed and saw America.

Other and Other made a mirror and in
I stepped and watched the water heal.

Of course there was no *man*, no *Dan*,
I'm speaking in terms of the moon—

and anyway this late at night our words
can't count. Not even these words count.

—*Dan Chiasson*

being a Catholic was a stumbling block.

Sometimes it seemed as if she were putting on a show—a display, maybe, to tease my father. To rile him up, as he himself would have said, to get his goat. But not because she disliked him or even wanted to make him uncomfortable. Quite the opposite. She seemed to be tormenting him almost as young girls torment boys at school, where arguments are a peculiar delight to both sides and insults are taken as flattery. My father argued with her always in a mild steady voice, and yet it was clear that he, too, had the intention of goading her on. Sometimes he would do a turnaround, and say that maybe she was right—that with her work on the newspaper, she must have sources of information that he didn't have. "You've put me straight," he'd say. "If I had any sense, I'd be obliged to you." And she'd say, "Don't give me that load of baloney."

"You two," my mother said, in mock despair and perhaps in real exhaustion,

and Alfrida told her to go and have a lie-down—she deserved it after this splendid dinner, and Alfrida and I would manage the dishes. My mother was subject to a tremor in her right arm, a stiffness in her fingers, that she believed came when she got overtired.

While we worked in the kitchen, Alfrida talked to me about celebrities—actors, even minor movie stars, who had made stage appearances in the city where she lived. In a lowered voice broken by wildly disrespectful laughter, she told me rumors about their bad behavior, the private scandals that had never made it into the magazines. She mentioned queers, artificial bosoms, household triangles—all things I had found hints of in my reading but felt giddy to hear about, even at third or fourth hand, in real life.

Alfrida's teeth always got my attention, so that, even during these confidential recitals, I sometimes lost track of what was being said. Her front teeth were all of a slightly different color, no

two alike. Some tended toward shades of dark ivory; others were opalescent, shadowed with lilac, and gave out fish-flashes of silver rims, occasionally a gleam of gold. People's teeth then seldom made such a solid, handsome show as they do now—unless they were false—but Alfrida's were unusual in their individuality, clear separation, and size. When Alfrida let out some jibe that was especially, knowingly outrageous, they seemed to leap to the fore like jolly spear fighters.

"She always did have trouble with her teeth," the aunts said. "She had that abscess, remember—the poison went all through her body."

How like them, I thought, to pick on any weakness in a superior person, to zoom in on any physical distress.

"Why doesn't she just have them all out and be done with it?" they said.

"Likely she couldn't afford it," my grandmother said, surprising everybody, as she sometimes did, by showing that she had been keeping up with a conversation all along.

And surprising me with the new, everyday sort of light this shone on Alfrida's life. I had believed that Alfrida was rich, at least in comparison with the rest of the family. She lived in an apartment—I had never seen it, but to me that fact conveyed at least the idea of a very civilized life—and she wore clothes that were not homemade, and her shoes were not Oxfords like the shoes of practically all the other grownup women I knew; they were sandals made of bright strips of plastic. It was hard to know whether my grandmother was simply living in the past, when getting your teeth done was the solemn, crowning expense of a lifetime, or whether she really knew things about Alfrida's life that I would not have guessed.

The rest of the family was never present when Alfrida had dinner at our house. She did go to see my grandmother, who was her aunt, her mother's sister, and who lived alternately with one or the other of my aunts. Alfrida went to whichever house my grandmother was staying in at the time, but the meal she took was always with us. Usually she came to our house first and visited awhile, and then gathered herself up, as if reluctantly, to make the other visit. When she came back later and we sat down to eat, nothing derogatory was said outright,

against the aunts and their husbands, and certainly nothing disrespectful about my grandmother. In fact, it was the way that Alfrida spoke of my grandmother—with a sudden sobriety and concern in her voice (what about her blood pressure, had she been to the doctor lately?)—that made me aware of the difference, of the coolness or restraint with which she asked after the others. There would be a similar restraint in my mother's reply, and an extra gravity in my father's—almost a caricature of gravity—that showed how they all agreed about something they could not say.

On the day I smoked the cigarette, Alfrida decided to take this routine a bit further, and she said somberly, "How about Asa then? Is he still as much of a conversation-grabber as ever?"

My father shook his head sadly, as if the thought of his brother-in-law's garulousness must weigh us all down.

"Indeed," he said. "He is indeed."

Then I took my chance.

"Looks like the roundworms have got into the hogs," I said. "Yup."

Except for the "yup," this was just what my uncle had recently said, and he had said it at this very table, being overcome by an uncharacteristic need to break the silence or to pass on something important that had just come to mind. And I said it with just his stately grunts, his innocent solemnity.

Alfrida gave a great approving laugh, showing her festive teeth.

My father bent over his plate, as if to hide how he was laughing, too, but of course not really hiding it, and my mother shook her head, biting her lips together, smiling. I felt a keen triumph. Nothing was said to put me in my place, no reproof for what was sometimes called my "sarcasm," my "being smart." The word "smart," when it was used about me, in the family, might mean intelligent, in which case it was used rather grudgingly—"oh, she's smart enough some ways"—or it might be used to mean pushy, attention-seeking, obnoxious. *Don't be so smart.*

Sometimes my mother said, "You have a cruel tongue."

Sometimes—this was a great deal worse—my father was disgusted with me. "What makes you think you have the right to run down decent people?"

This day nothing like that happened. I seemed to be as free as a visitor at the table, almost as free as Alfrida, and flourishing under the banner of my own personality.

But a gap was about to open, and perhaps that was the last time, the very last time, that Alfrida sat at our table. Christmas cards continued to be exchanged, possibly even letters—as long as my mother could manage a pen—

and we still saw Alfrida's name in the paper, but I cannot recall any visits during the last couple of years I lived at home.

It may have been that Alfrida had asked if she could bring her friend, and been told that she could not. If she was already living with him, that would have been one reason, and, if he was the same man she lived with later, the fact that he was married would have been another. My parents would have been united in this. My mother had a horror of irregular sex or flaunted sex—of any sex, you might say, for the proper, married kind was not acknowledged at all—and my father, too, judged these matters strictly, at that time in his life. He might have had a special objection, also, to any man who could get a hold over Alfrida. She would have made herself cheap, in my parents' eyes.

But she may not have asked at all; she may have known enough not to. During the time of those lively visits there may have been no man in her life, and then, when there was one, her attention may have shifted entirely.

Or she may have been wary of the special atmosphere of a household where there is a sick person who will go on getting sicker and never get better. Which was the case with my mother, whose odd symptoms joined together, and turned a corner, and instead of an inconvenience became her whole destiny.

"The poor thing," the aunts said.

And as my mother was changed from a mother into a stricken presence around the house, the other, formerly so restricted, females in the family seemed to gain some little liveliness and increased competence in the world. My grandmother got herself a hearing aid—something nobody would have suggested to her. One of the aunts' husbands—not Asa, but the one named Irvine—died, and the aunt who had been married to him learned to drive a car and got a job doing alterations in a clothing store and no longer wore a hairnet.

They called in to see my mother, and always saw the same thing—that the one who had been better looking, who had never quite let them forget that she was a schoolteacher, was growing month by month slower and stiffer in the movements of her limbs and thicker and more importunate in her speech, and that nothing was going to help her.

They told me to take good care of



"Just remember, son, it doesn't matter whether you win or lose—unless you want Daddy's love."

her. "She's your mother," they reminded me. "The poor thing."

Alfrida would not have been able to say those things, and she might not have been able to find anything to say in their place. Her not coming to see us was all right with me. I didn't want people coming. I had no time for them. I had become a furious housekeeper, waxing the floors and ironing even the dish towels, and it was all done to keep some sort of disgrace (my mother's deterioration seemed to be a unique disgrace that infected us all) at bay. It was done to make it seem as if I lived in a normal family in an ordinary house, but the moment somebody stepped in our door and saw my mother they saw that this was not so and they pitied us. A thing I could not stand.



I won a scholarship, and I didn't stay home to take care of my mother or of anything else. The college I went to was in the city where Alfrida lived. After a few months, she invited me to supper, but I couldn't go, because I worked every evening of the week except Sundays—in the city library, downtown, and in the college library, both of which stayed open until nine o'clock. Sometime later, during the winter, Alfrida asked me again, and this time the invitation was for a Sunday. I told her that I couldn't come because I was going to a concert.

"Oh—a date?" she said, and I said yes, but at the time it wasn't true. I would go to the free Sunday concerts in the college auditorium, with another girl, or two or three other girls, for something to do and in the faint hope of meeting some boys.

"Well, you'll have to bring him around sometime," Alfrida said. "I'm dying to meet him."

Toward the end of the year I did have someone to bring, and I had actually met him at a concert. But I would never have brought him to meet Alfrida. I would never have brought any of my new friends to meet her. My new friends were people who said, "Have you read 'Look Homeward, Angel'? Oh, you have to read that. Have you read 'Buddenbrooks'?" They were people with whom I went to see "Forbidden Games" and "Les Enfants du Paradis," when the Film Society brought them in. The boy I went out with, and later became engaged to, had taken me to the Music Building, where you could listen to records at lunch hour.

He introduced me to Gounod, and because of Gounod I loved opera, and because of opera I loved Mozart.

When Alfrida left a message at my rooming house, asking me to call back, I never did. After that, she didn't call again.

She still wrote for the paper. Occasionally I glanced at one of her rhapsodies about Royal Doulton figurines or imported ginger biscuits or honeymoon negligees. But now that I was living in the city, I seldom looked at the paper that had once seemed to me to be the center of its life—and even, in a way, the center of our life at home, sixty miles away. The jokes, the compulsive insincerity, of people like Alfrida and Horse Henry now struck me as tawdry and boring.

I did not worry about running into her, even in this city that was not, after all, so very large. I never went into the shops that she mentioned in her column, and she lived far away from my rooming house, somewhere on the south side of town.

Nor did I think that Alfrida was the kind of person to show up at the library. The very word "library" would probably make her turn down her big mouth in a parody of consternation, as she used to do at the books in the bookcase in our house—some of them won as school prizes by my teen-age parents (there was my mother's maiden name, in her beautiful, lost handwriting), books that

seemed to me not like things bought in a store at all but like presences in the house, just as the trees outside the window were not plants but presences rooted in the ground. "The Mill on the Floss," "The Call of the Wild," "The Heart of Midlothian." "Lot of hot-shot reading in there," Alfrida had said. "Bet you don't crack those very often." And my father had said no, he didn't, falling in with her comradely tone of dismissal, and to some extent telling a lie, because he did look into them, once in a long while, when he had the time.

That was the kind of lie I hoped never to have to tell, about the things that really mattered to me. And in order not to, I would pretty well have to stay clear of the people I used to know.

At the end of my second year, I was leaving college—my scholarship had covered only two years there. But it didn't matter. I was planning to be a writer, anyway. And I was getting married.

Alfrida had got word of this, and she got in touch with me again.

"I guess you must've been too busy to call me, or maybe nobody ever gave you my messages," she said.

I said that maybe I had been, or maybe they hadn't.

This time I agreed to visit. A visit would not commit me to anything, since I was not going to be living in this city in the future. I picked a Sunday, in the middle of May, just after my final exams

were over, when my fiancé was going to be in Ottawa for a job interview. The day was bright and sunny, and I decided to walk. There were parts of the city that were still entirely strange to me. The shade trees along the northern streets had just come out in leaf, and the lilacs, the ornamental crab-apple trees, and the beds of tulips were all in flower, the lawns like fresh carpets. But, after a while, I found myself walking along streets where there were no shade trees, streets where the houses were hardly an arm's reach from the sidewalk, and where such lilacs as there were—lilacs will grow anywhere—were pale, as if sun-bleached, and their fragrance did not carry. On these streets, in addition to the houses, there were narrow apartment buildings, only two or three stories high, some with the utilitarian decoration of a rim of glass bricks around their doors, and some with raised windows and limp curtains falling out over their sills.

Alfrida's apartment was the whole upstairs of a house. The downstairs—at least the front part of the downstairs—had been turned into a shop, which was closed, it being Sunday. It was a second-hand shop—I could see through the dirty front windows a lot of nondescript furniture with stacks of old dishes and utensils set everywhere. The only thing that caught my eye was a honey pail, exactly like the honey pail with a blue sky and a golden beehive in which I had carried my lunch to school when I was six or seven years old. I could remember reading over and over the words on its side: "All pure honey will granulate."

I had no idea what "granulate" meant, but I liked the sound of it—it seemed ornate and delicious.

I had taken longer to get there than I had expected, and I was very hot. I had not thought that Alfrida, inviting me to lunch, would present me with a meal like the Sunday dinners at home, but it was cooked chicken and vegetables I smelled as I climbed the outdoor stairway.

"I thought you'd got lost," Alfrida called out above me. "I was about to get up a rescue party."

Instead of a sundress, she was wearing a pink blouse with a floppy bow at the neck, tucked into a pleated brown skirt. Her hair was no longer done up in smooth rolls but cut short and frizzed around her face, its dark brown now

harshly touched with red. And her face, which I remembered as lean and summer-tanned, had got fuller and somewhat pouchy. In the noon light, her makeup stood out on her skin like orange-pink paint.

But the biggest difference was that she had got false teeth, of a uniform color, slightly overfilling her mouth and giving an anxious edge to her old expression of slapdash eagerness.

"Well—haven't you plumped out," she said. "You used to be so skinny."

This was true, but I did not like to hear it. Along with all the girls at the rooming house, I ate cheap food—copious meals of Kraft Dinner and packages of jam-filled cookies. My fiancé, so sturdily and possessively in favor of everything about me, said that he liked full-bodied women and that I reminded him of Jane Russell. I did not mind his saying that, but I was affronted when other people had anything to say about my appearance. Particularly when it was somebody like Alfrida, somebody who had lost all importance in my life. I really believed that such people had no right to be looking at me, or forming any opinions about me, let alone stating them.

The house was narrow across the front but long from front to back. There was a living room, whose ceilings sloped at the sides and whose windows overlooked the street, a hall-like dining room with no windows at all, a kitchen, a bathroom also without windows that got its daylight through a pebbled-glass pane in the door, and, across the back of the house, a glassed-in sunporch.

The sloping ceilings made the rooms look makeshift, as if they were only pretending to be anything but bedrooms. But they were crowded with serious furniture—dining-room table and chairs, kitchen table and chairs, living-room sofa and recliner—all meant for larger, proper rooms. Doilies on the tables, squares of embroidered white cloth protecting the backs and arms of the sofa and chairs, sheer curtains across the windows and

heavy flowered curtains at the sides—it was all more like the aunts' houses than I would have thought possible. And on the dining-room wall—not in the bathroom or the bedroom but in the dining room—there hung a picture that was a silhouette of a girl in a hoopskirt, all constructed of pink satin ribbon.

Alfrida seemed to guess something of what I was thinking.

"I know I've got far too much stuff in here," she said. "But it's my parents' stuff. It's family furnishings, and I couldn't let it go."

I had never thought of her as having parents. As far as I knew, Alfrida's mother had died when she was six years old, and she had been brought up by my grandmother, who was her aunt.

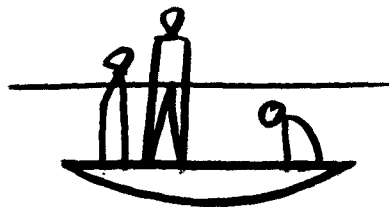
"My dad and mother's," Alfrida said. "When Dad went off, your grandma stored it all in her back room and the basement and the shed, because she thought it ought to be mine when I grew up, and so here it is. I couldn't turn it down, when she went to that trouble."

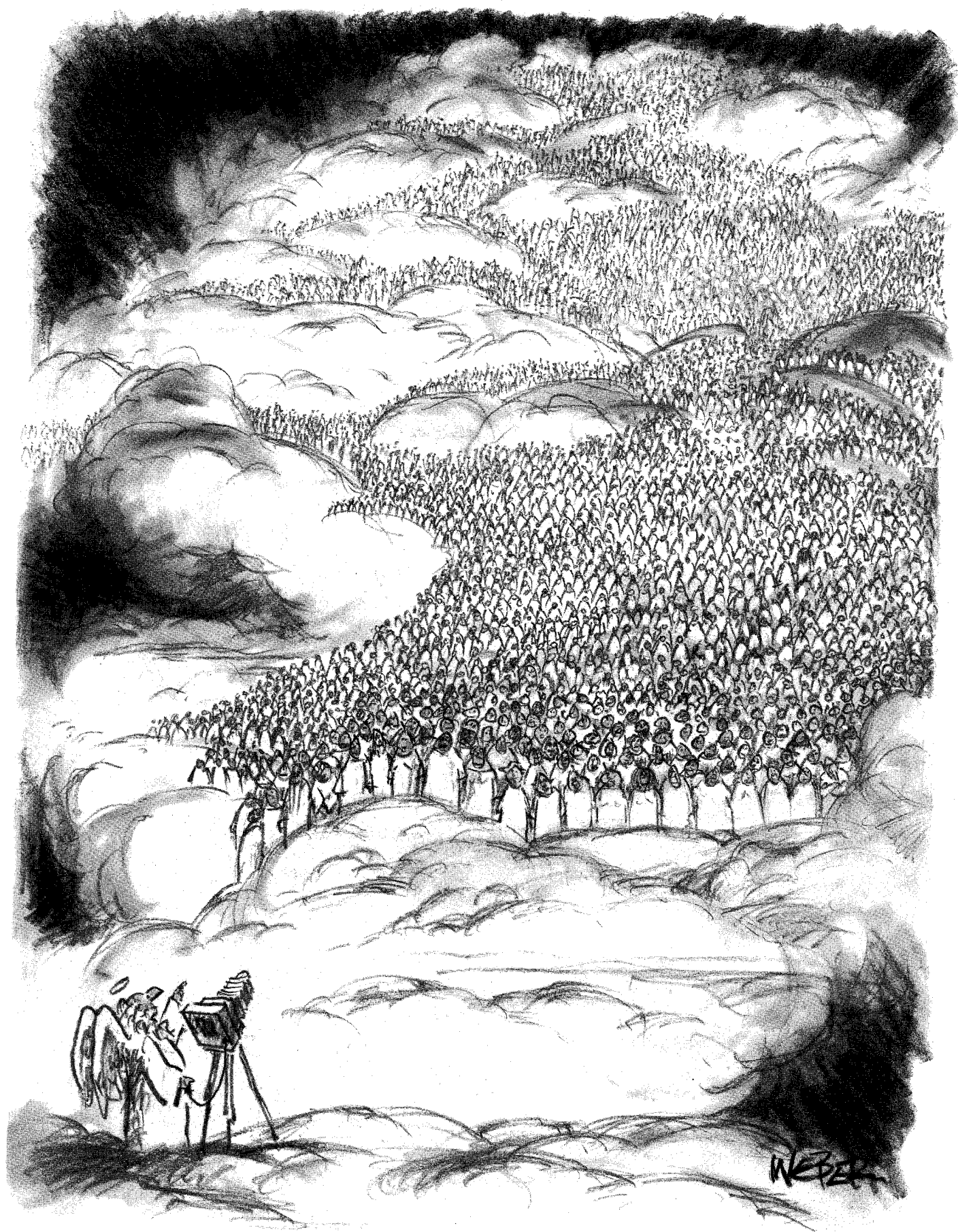
Now it came back to me—the part of Alfrida's life that I had forgotten about. Alfrida's father had married again. He had left the farm and got a job working for the railway. He had had some other children, and sometimes Alfrida used to mention them, in a joking way that had something to do with how many children there had been and how quickly they had followed one another.

"Come and meet Bill," Alfrida said.

Bill was out on the sunporch. He sat as if waiting to be summoned, on a low couch or daybed that was covered with a brown plaid blanket. The blanket was rumpled—he must have been lying on it recently—and the blinds on the windows were pulled down to their sills. The light in the room—the hot sunlight coming through rain-marked yellow blinds—and the rough blanket and faded, dented cushion, even the smell of the blanket and of the masculine slippers, old, scuffed slippers that had lost their shape and pattern, reminded me, just as much as the doilies and the heavy polished furniture in the inner rooms had done, of my aunts' houses. There, too, you could come upon a shabby male hideaway with its furtive yet insistent odors, its shamefaced but stubborn rejection of the female domain.

Bill stood up and shook my hand,





"Lucy, move—you're blocking Pliny the Elder."



"Guess you were right, chief—I just needed to be burped."

however, as the uncles would never have done with a strange girl. Or with any girl. No specific rudeness would have held them back—just a dread of appearing ceremonious.

He was a tall man with wavy, glistening gray hair and a smooth but not youthful face. A handsome man, with the force of his good looks somehow drained away by indifferent health or bad luck or lack of gumption. But he still had a worn courtesy, a way of bending toward a woman, which suggested that the meeting would be a pleasure, for her and for himself.

Alfrida directed us into the windowless dining room, where the lights were on in the middle of this bright day. I got the impression that the meal had been ready some time ago, and that my late arrival had delayed their usual schedule. Bill served the roast chicken and dressing, Alfrida the vegetables. Alfrida said to Bill, "Honey, what do you think that is beside your plate?" and then he remembered to pick up his napkin.

He did not have much to say. He offered the gravy; he inquired as to whether I wanted mustard relish or salt and pepper; he followed the conversation by turning his head toward Alfrida or toward me. Every so often he made a little whistling sound between his teeth, a shivery

sound that seemed meant to be genial and appreciative and that I thought at first might be a prelude to some remark. But it never was, and Alfrida never paused for it. I have since seen reformed drinkers who behaved somewhat as he did—chiming in agreeably but unable to carry things beyond that, helplessly preoccupied. I never knew whether Bill was one of them, but he did seem to carry around a history of defeat, of troubles borne and lessons learned, and he had an air, too, of gallant accommodation for whatever choices had gone wrong or chances hadn't panned out.

These were frozen peas and carrots, Alfrida said. Frozen vegetables were fairly new at the time.

"They beat the canned," she said. "They're practically as good as fresh."

Then Bill made a whole statement. He said that they were better than fresh. The color, the flavor, everything was better than fresh. He said that it was remarkable what they could do now and what would be done by way of freezing things in the future.

Alfrida leaned forward, smiling. She seemed almost to hold her breath, as if he were her child taking unsupported steps, or a first lone wobble on a bicycle.

There was a way they could inject

something into a chicken, he told us, a new process that would have every chicken coming out the same—plump and tasty. No such thing as taking a risk on getting an inferior chicken anymore.

"Bill's field is chemistry," Alfrida said.

When I had nothing to say to this, she added, "He worked for Gooderhams."

Still nothing.

"The distillers," she said. "Gooderhams whiskey."

The reason that I had nothing to say was not that I was rude or bored (or any more rude than I was naturally at that time, or more bored than I had expected to be) but that I did not understand that I should ask questions—almost any questions at all, to draw a shy male into conversation, to shake him out of his abstraction, and set him up as a man of a certain authority, and therefore the man of the house. I did not understand why Alfrida looked at him with such a fiercely encouraging smile. All my experience of women with men—of a woman listening to her man and hoping that he will establish himself as somebody that she can reasonably be proud of—was in the future. The only observation that I had made of couples was of my aunts and uncles and of my mother and father, and those husbands and wives seemed to have remote and formalized connections and no obvious dependence on each other.

Bill continued eating as if he had not heard this mention of his profession and his employer, and Alfrida began to question me about my courses. She was still smiling, but her smile had changed. There was a little twitch of impatience and unpleasantness in it, as if she were just waiting for me to get to the end of my explanations so that she could say—as she did say—"You couldn't get me to read that stuff for a million dollars."

"Life's too short," she went on. "You know, down at the paper we sometimes get somebody that's been through all that. Honors English. Honors Philosophy. You don't know what to do with them. They can't write worth a nickel. I've told you that, haven't I?" she said to Bill, and Bill looked up and gave her his dutiful smile.

"So what do you do for fun?" Alfrida said, sometime later.

"A Streetcar Named Desire" was

playing at a theatre in Toronto at that time, and I told her that I had gone down on the train with a couple of friends to see it.

Alfrida let her knife and fork clatter onto her plate.

"That filth!" she cried. Her face leapt out at me, carved with sudden anger and disgust. Then she spoke more calmly but still with a virulent displeasure.

"You went all the way to Toronto to see that filth."

We had finished the dessert, and Bill picked that moment to ask if he might be excused. He asked Alfrida, then with the slightest bow he asked me. He went back to the sunporch and in a little while we could smell his pipe. Alfrida, watching him go, seemed to forget about me and the play. There was a look of such stricken tenderness on her face that, when she stood up, I thought she was going to follow him. But she was only going to get her cigarettes.

She held them out to me and, when I took one, she said, with a deliberate effort at jollity, "I see you kept up the bad habit I got you started on." It seemed as if she had remembered that I was not a child anymore and that I did not have to be in her house and there was no point in making an enemy of me. And I wasn't going to argue—I did not care what Alfrida thought about Tennessee Williams. Or what she thought about anything else.

"I guess it's your own business," Alfrida said. "You can go where you want to go." And she added, "After all—you'll be a married woman pretty soon."

By her tone, this could have meant "I have to allow that you're grownup now" or "Pretty soon you'll have to toe the line."

We got up and started to collect the dishes. Working close to each other in the small space between the kitchen table and counter and the refrigerator, we soon developed, without speaking about it, a certain order and harmony of scraping and stacking and putting the leftover food into smaller containers for storage and filling the sink with hot, soapy water. We brought the ashtray out to the kitchen and stopped every now and then to take a restorative, businesslike drag on our cigarettes. There are things women agree on or don't agree on when they work together in this way—whether it is all right to smoke, for

instance, or preferable not to in case some migratory ash might find its way onto a clean dish, or whether every single thing that has been on the table has to be washed, whether it has been used or not—and it turned out that Alfrida and I agreed. Also, the thought that I could get away, once the dishes were done, made me feel more relaxed and generous. I had already said that I had to meet a friend that afternoon.

"These are pretty dishes," I said. They were cream-colored, almost yellowish, with a rim of blue flowers.

"Well, they were my mother's wedding dishes," Alfrida said. "That was one other good thing your grandma did for me. She packed up all my mother's dishes and put them away until the time came when I could use them. Jeanie never knew they existed. They wouldn't have lasted long, with that bunch."

Jeanie. That bunch. Her stepmother and the half brothers and sisters.

"You know about that, don't you?" Alfrida said. "You know what happened to my mother?" Of course I knew. Alfrida's mother had died when an oil lamp exploded in her hands—that is, she died of the burns she got when a lamp exploded in her hands—and my aunts and my mother had spoken of this regularly. Nothing could be said about Alfrida's mother or about Alfrida's father, and very little about Alfrida herself, without that death being dragged in and tacked onto it. It was the reason that Alfrida's father left the farm (somewhat of a downward step morally, if not financially). It was a reason to be desperately careful with coal oil, and a reason to be

grateful for electricity, whatever the cost. And it was a dreadful thing for a child of Alfrida's age, whatever. (That is—whatever she had done with herself since.)

If it hadn't've been for the thunderstorm she wouldn't ever have been lighting a lamp in the middle of the afternoon.

She lived all that night and the next day and the next night, and it would have been the best thing in the world for her if she hadn't've.

Just the year after that the Hydro came down their road, and they didn't have the need of the lamps anymore.

The aunts and my mother seldom felt the same way about anything, but they shared a feeling about this story. The feeling was in their voices whenever they said Alfrida's mother's name. The story seemed to be a horrible treasure to them, a distinction our family alone could claim. To listen to them had always made me feel as if there were some obscene connivance going on, a fond fingering of whatever was grisly or disastrous.

Men were not like this, in my experience. Men looked away from frightful happenings as soon as they could and behaved as if there were no use, once things were over with, in mentioning them or thinking about them ever again. They didn't want to stir themselves up, or stir other people up.

So if Alfrida was going to talk about it, I thought, what a good thing it was that my fiancé had not come. What a good thing that he didn't have to hear about Alfrida's mother, on top of finding out about my mother and my family's relative—or maybe considerable—pov-



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erty. He admired opera and Laurence Olivier's Hamlet, but he had no time for the squalor of tragedy in ordinary life. His parents were healthy and good-looking and prosperous (though he said, of course, that they were dull) and it seemed that he had not had to know anybody who did not live in fairly sunny circumstances. Failures in life—failures of luck, of health, of finances—all struck him as lapses, and his resolute approval of me did not extend to my ramshackle background.

"They wouldn't let me in to see her, at the hospital," Alfrida said, and at least she was saying this in her normal voice, not preparing the way with any greasy tone of piety. "Well, I probably wouldn't have let me in, either, if I'd been in their shoes. I've no idea what she looked like. Probably all bound up like a mummy. Or if she wasn't she should have been. I wasn't there when it happened. I was at school. It got very dark, and the teacher turned the lights on—we had the electric lights, at school—and we all had to stay until the thunderstorm was over. Then my Aunt Lily—well, your grandmother—she came to meet me and took me to her place. And I never got to see my mother again."

I thought that that was all she was going to say, but in a moment she continued, in a voice that had actually brightened up a bit, as if she were preparing for a laugh.

"I yelled and yelled my fool head off. I wanted to see her. I carried on and carried on, and finally, when they couldn't shut me up, your grandmother said to me, 'You're just better off not to see her. You wouldn't want to see her, if you knew what she looks like now. You wouldn't want to remember her this way.' I guess I already knew that she was going to die, because it didn't seem strange to me to hear her talk about remembering her. But you know what I said? I remember saying it. I said, 'But she would want to see me.' *She would want to see me.*"

Then Alfrida really did laugh, or made a snorting sound that was evasive and scornful.

"I must've thought I was the cat's p.j.s, mustn't I? *She would want to see me.*"

This was a part of the story that I had never heard.

And the minute that I heard it, some-

thing happened. It was as if a trap had snapped shut to hold these words in my head. I did not exactly understand what use I would have for them. I knew only how they jolted me and released me, right away, to breathe a different kind of air, available only to myself.

She would want to see me.

The story I wrote, with these words in it, would not exist until years later, not until it had become quite unimportant to think about who had put the idea into my head in the first place.

I thanked Alfrida. I said that I had to go. Alfrida went to call Bill to say good-bye to me, but came back to report that he had fallen asleep.

"He'll be kicking himself when he wakes up," she said. "He enjoyed meeting you."

She took off her apron and accompanied me all the way down the outside steps. At the bottom of the steps was a gravel path leading around to the sidewalk. The gravel crunched under our feet, and she stumbled in her thin-soled house shoes.

She said, "Ouch. God damn it," and caught hold of my shoulder.

"How's your dad?" she said.

"He's all right."

"He works too hard."

I said, "He has to."

"Oh, I know. And how's your mother?"

"She's about the same."

She turned aside, toward the shop-window.

"Who do they think is ever going to buy this junk? Look at that honey pail. Your dad and I used to take our lunch to school in pails just like that."

"So did I," I said.

"Did you?" She squeezed me. "You tell your folks I'm thinking about them will you do that?"

Alfrida did not come to my father's funeral. I wondered if that was because she did not want to see me. As far as I knew, she had never made public what she held against me. But my father had known about it. When I was home visiting him and learned that Alfrida was living not far away—in my grandmother's house, in fact, which she had inherited—I had suggested that we go to see her. This was in the flurry between my two marriages, when I was in an expansive mood, newly re-

leased and able to make contact with anyone I chose.

My father said, "Well, you know, Alfrida was a bit upset."

He was calling her Alfrida now. When had that started?

I could not even think, at first, what Alfrida might be upset about. My father had to remind me of the story, published several years ago, and I was surprised, even impatient and a little angry, to think of Alfrida's objecting to something that seemed now to have so little to do with her.

"It wasn't Alfrida at all," I said to my father. "I changed it. I wasn't even thinking about her, it was a character. Anybody could see that."

But, as a matter of fact, there was still the exploding lamp, the mother in her charnel wrappings, the staunch bereft child.

"Well," my father said. He was in general quite pleased that I had become a writer, but he had some reservations about what might be called my character. About the fact that I had ended my marriage for personal—that is, wanton—reasons, and about the way I went around justifying myself, or perhaps, as he might have said, weaseling out of things. But he would not say so—it was not his business anymore.

I asked him how he knew that Alfrida felt this way.

He said, "A letter."

A letter, though they lived not far apart. I did feel sorry to think that he had had to bear the brunt of what could be taken as my thoughtlessness, or even my wrongdoing. Also that he and Alfrida seemed now to be on such formal terms. I wondered what he was leaving out. Had he felt compelled to defend my writing to Alfrida, as he had to other people? He would do that now, though it was never easy for him. In his uneasiness, he might have said something harsh.

There was a danger whenever I was on home ground. It was the danger of seeing my life through someone else's eyes—comparing it, even, with the rich domesticity of others, their pileup production of hand-knitted garments and buttery cakes. Of seeing my own work as ever-increasing rolls of inky-black barbed wire—intricate, bewildering, uncomfortable. So that it might become

harder to say that writing was worth the trouble.

Worth my trouble, maybe, but what about anyone else's?

My father had said that Alfrida was living alone now. I asked him what had become of Bill. He said that all of that was outside his jurisdiction. But he believed that there had been a bit of a rescue operation.

"Of Bill? How come? Who by?"

"Well, I believe there was a wife."

"I met him at Alfrida's once. I liked him."

"People did. Women."

I had to consider that the rupture might have had nothing to do with me. My father had remarried, and my stepmother had urged him into a new sort of life. They went bowling and curling and regularly joined other couples for coffee and doughnuts at Tim Hortons. She had been a widow for a long time before she married him, and she had many friends from those days who became new friends for him. What had happened with him and Alfrida might have been simply one of the changes, the wearing out of old attachments, that I understood so well in my own life but did not expect to happen in the lives of older people—particularly in the lives of people at home.

My stepmother died just a little while before my father. After their short, happy marriage, they were sent to separate cemeteries to lie beside their first, more troublesome partners. Before either of those deaths, Alfrida had moved back to the city. She didn't sell my grandmother's house; she just went away and left it. "That's a pretty funny way of doing things," my father wrote to me.

There were a lot of people at my father's funeral, a lot of people I didn't know. A woman came across the grass at the cemetery to speak to me. I thought at first that she must have been a friend of my stepmother's. Then I saw that the woman was only a few years past my own age. The stocky figure and puffed-up, hairdresser-blond curls and floral-patterned jacket made her look older.

"I recognized you by your picture," she said. "Alfrida used to always be bragging about you."

I said, "Alfrida's not dead, is she?"

"Oh, no," the woman said, and went

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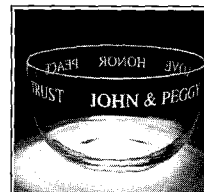


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on to tell me that Alfrida was in a nursing home in a town just north of Toronto.

"I moved her down there so's I could keep an eye on her."

Now it was easy to tell—even by her voice—that she was somebody of my own generation, and it came to me that she must be a member of the other family, a half sister of Alfrida's, born when Alfrida was almost grownup.

She told me her name, and it was of course not the same as Alfrida's—she must have married. And I couldn't recall Alfrida's ever having mentioned any of her half family by their first names.

I asked how Alfrida was, and the woman said, Cataracts in both eyes, but when they ripened they could be taken off. And she had a serious kidney problem, which meant that she had to be on dialysis twice a week.

"Other than that?" she said, and laughed. I thought, Yes, a sister, because I could hear something of Alfrida in that reckless tossed laugh.

"So she doesn't travel too good," she said. "Or else I would've brought her. She still gets the paper from here, and I read it to her sometimes, and that's where I saw about your dad."

I wondered out loud, impulsively, if I should go to visit, at the nursing home.

The emotions of the funeral—all the warm and relieved and reconciled feelings opened up in me by the death of my father at a reasonable age—prompted this suggestion. It would have been hard to carry out. My husband—my second husband—and I were flying to Europe in two days on an already delayed holiday.

"I don't know if you'd get so much out of it," the woman said. "She has her good days. Then she has her bad days. You never know. Sometimes I think she's putting it on. Like, she'll sit there all day and whatever anybody says to her, she'll just say the same thing. 'Fit as a fiddle and ready for love.' That's what she'll say all day long. 'Fit as a fiddle and ready for love.' She'd drive you crazy. Then, other days, she can answer all right."

Again, the woman's voice and laugh, this time half submerged, reminded me of Alfrida's, and I said, "You know, I must have met you. I remember once, when I was over at my grandmother's house and Alfrida's stepmother and her father dropped in, or maybe it was only her father and some of the children—"

"Oh, that's not who I am," the woman said. "You thought I was Alfrida's sister? Glory. I must be looking my age."

I started to say that I could not see her very well, and it was true. In October, the afternoon sun was low, and it was coming straight into my eyes. The woman was standing against the light, so that it was hard to make out her features or her expression.

She twitched her shoulders nervously and importantly. She said, "Alfrida was my birth mom."

Mawm. Mother.

Then she told me, at not too great length, the story that she must have told often, because it was about an emphatic event in her life and an adventure that she had embarked on alone. She had been adopted by a family in eastern Ontario—they were the only family she had ever known ("and I love them dearly")—and she had married and had her children, who were grownup before she got the urge to find out who her own mother was. It wasn't too easy, because of the way records used to be kept, and the secrecy ("It was kept one-hundred-per-cent secret that she had me"), but a few years ago she had tracked down Alfrida.

"Just in time, too," she said. "I mean, it was time somebody came along to look after her. As much as I can."

I said, "I never knew."

"No. Those days, I don't suppose too many did. They warn you, when you start out to do this, it could be a shock when you show up. Older people, it's still heavy-duty. But I don't think she minded. Earlier on, maybe she would have."

There was a sense of triumph about the woman, which wasn't hard to understand. If you have something to tell that will stagger someone, and you've told it and it has done that, you must experience a balmy moment of power. In this case, it was so complete that she felt a need to apologize.

"Excuse me, talking all about myself and not saying how sorry I am about your dad."

I thanked her.

"You know, Alfrida told me that you dad and her were walking home from school one day—this was in high school. They couldn't walk all the way together because, you know, in those days, a boy and a girl, they would just get teased something terrible. So if he got out first he'd wait just where their road went of

he main road, outside of town, and if she got out first she would do the same, wait for him. And one day they were talking together and they heard all the bells starting to ring and you know what that was? It was the end of the First World War."

I said that I had heard that story, too. Only I thought they were just children."

"Then how could they be coming home from high school, if they were just children?"

I said that I had thought they were out playing in the fields. "They had my father's dog with them. He was called Mack."

"Maybe they had the dog, all right. Maybe he came to meet them. I wouldn't think she'd get mixed up on what she was telling me. She was pretty good on remembering anything that involved our dad."

Now I was aware of two things. First, that my father had been born in 1902, and that Alfrida was close to the same age. So it was much more likely that they were walking home from high school than that they were playing in the fields, and it was odd that I had never thought of that before. Maybe they had said they were in the fields, that is, walking home across the fields. Maybe they had never said "playing."

Also, that the feeling of apology or endlessness, the harmlessness that I had felt in this woman a little while before, was not there now.

I said, "Things get changed around."

"That's right," the woman said. "People change things around. You want to know what Alfrida said about you?"

Now. Now.

"What?"

"She said you were smart but you aren't ever quite as smart as you thought you were."

I made myself keep looking into the dark face against the light. Smart, too smart, not smart enough. Joke on you. I said, "Is that all?"

"Except she said you were a cold person, sort of. That's her talking, not me. I haven't got anything against you."

That Sunday, after the lunch at Alfrida's, I set out to walk all the way back to my rooming house. Walked both ways, I reckoned that I would cover about ten miles, which ought to

offset the effects of the meal I had eaten. I felt over-full, not just of food but of everything that I had seen and sensed in the apartment. The crowded, old-fashioned furnishings. Bill's silences. Alfrida's love, stubborn as sludge, and inappropriate, and hopeless—as far as I could see—on the ground of age alone.

After I had walked for a while, my stomach did not feel so heavy. I made a vow not to eat anything for the next twenty-four hours. I walked north and west, north and west, on the streets of the tidily rectangular small city. On a Sunday afternoon, there was hardly any traffic, except on the main thoroughfares. A bus might go by with only two or three people in it. People I did not know and who did not know me. What a blessing.

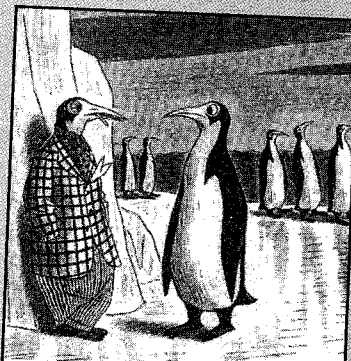
I had lied. I was not meeting any friend. My friends had mostly gone home to wherever they lived. My fiancé would be away until the next day—he was visiting his parents, in Cobourg, on the way home from Ottawa. There would be nobody in the rooming house when I got there—nobody I had to bother talking or listening to. I had nothing to do.

When I had walked for over an hour, I saw a drugstore that was open. I went in and had a cup of coffee. The coffee was reheated, black and bitter—its taste was medicinal, exactly what I needed. I was already feeling relieved, and now I began to feel happy. Such happiness, to be alone. To see the hot, late-afternoon light on the sidewalk outside, the branches of a tree just out in leaf, throwing their skimpy shadows. To hear from the back of the shop the sounds of the ballgame that the man who had served me was listening to on the radio. I did not think of the story that I would write about Alfrida—not of that in particular—but of the work I wanted to do, which seemed more like grabbing something out of the air than like constructing stories. The cries of the crowd came to me like big heartbeats, full of sorrows. Lovely, formal-sounding waves, with their distant, almost inhuman assent and lamentation.

This was what I wanted, this was what I thought I had to pay attention to, this was how I wanted my life to be. ♦

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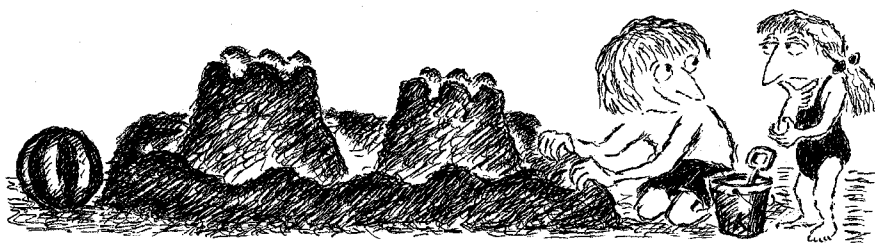
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THE CRITICS



BOOKS

FALSE FRONTS

Two chronicles of lying (sort of).

BY LOUIS MENAND

It seems a duty, in a review of two books that advertise lying as their subjects, to screen the titles for possible mendacity, and it is therefore necessary to report that Evelin Sullivan's "The Concise Book of Lying" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; \$25) is not concise, and that Jeremy Campbell's "The Liar's Tale: A History of Falsehood" (Norton; \$26.95) is not a history of false-

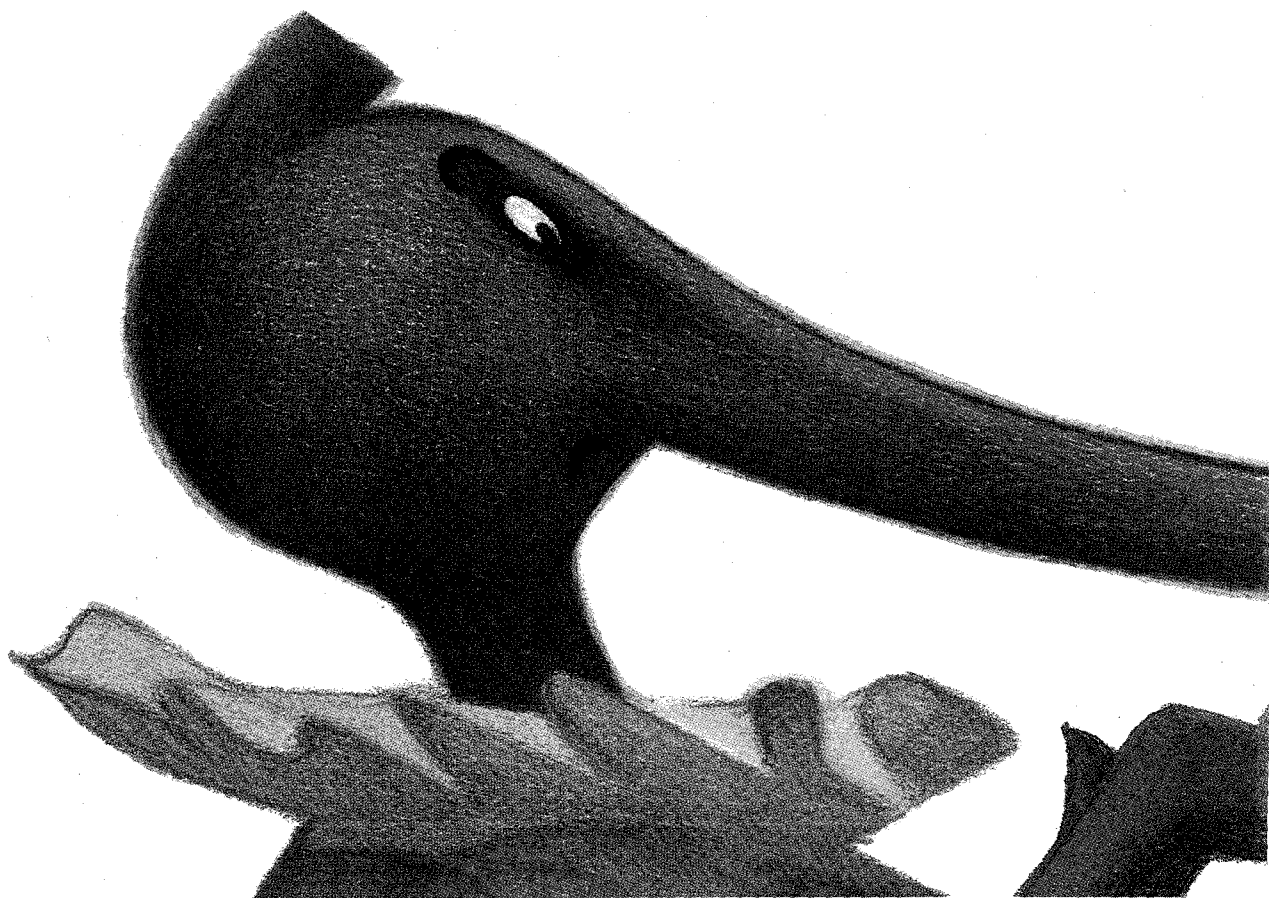
hood, or, for that matter, the tale of a liar. If these books were making a case for deception, it would be a different matter. A misleading title might suit a book designed to disabuse us of our respect for veracity. But veracity is what Sullivan and Campbell are for. Their books are not apologies for lying. They are on the side of truth.

Sullivan is a novelist, and "The Con-

cise Book of Lying" is a series of chatty essays on topics, chosen, as she cheerfully admits, more or less at whim, that have something to do with deception from Eve and the serpent to Shakespeare's "Othello," polygraph tests, Brer Rabbit, and the digger wasp, an insect that builds several false burrows in order to disguise the location of its real home. Sullivan's view is that although deception is part of life, it is generally to be deplored. Few people would disagree—which is, of course, a problem. It is not a problem that seems to have troubled the author, however, who is happy to end every discussion in the same place she and most of her readers started out. "Those who have lost the faculty to tell that it is wrong to harm others, or that deception is one form of harm, have been deprived of a humanizing feature and have suffered an impoverishment of their moral life," she observes. Also, "The shock of discovering that someone to whom you feel close deceives you can be tremendous, and the loss of trust and disappointment following the discovery can have a lasting ill effect on the relationship." Noted.

"The Liar's Tale" is a different ma-

LORENZO MATTOTTI



ter. It is a decorum of book publishing that the author is not held responsible for the promotional material on the jacket; but, when we are dealing with a subject as important as truth, we cannot follow a decorum to stand in our way. The jacket flap on "The Liar's Tale" reads as follows: "A bold new inquiry into ethics and philosophy, 'The Liar's Tale' explores the benefits of falsehood." It's a lie! "The Liar's Tale" is not pro falsehood, and in any case falsehood is not really its subject. Its subject is knowledge, and whether we can, and should, aspire to know things truly. Campbell, a journalist who has written several books on scientific subjects, thinks that, indeed, we should aspire to know things truly, and he is distressed by what he calls "an almost unprecedented tolerance of falsehood" today, a development he blames on something he calls "postmodernism." His method of establishing this claim is to review the history of Western thought, from pre-Socratics to Richard Rorty.

Reviewing the history of Western thought has become a common method of explaining how we have ended up in whatever condition we are supposed to

have ended up in—Nietzsche said this, Heidegger said that, Foucault came along, and now no one teaches Shakespeare anymore—but you need only to reflect for a minute to see how peculiar it is. It treats abstractions as the governing principles of social life. Some writer, in a book that a tiny number of people have heard of and an even tinier number have read, splits a philosophical hair, and two hundred years later we get Watergate, deconstruction, and the Monica Lewinsky scandal. The problem with this form of explanation isn't that it takes thought too seriously. It's that it misses the point of thinking.

According to "The Liar's Tale," for example, Immanuel Kant has a good deal to answer for. Thanks partly to his work, Campbell explains, "the reliability of knowledge was subverted." Now, Kant was a philosopher: his job was to think theoretically. He wasn't trying to subvert or not to subvert; he was only trying to see to the bottom of things. He asked himself the question "What can human beings know with reasonable certainty?" and he concluded that such knowledge must be limited. Minds can know only what they are equipped to

know. There may be supersensible entities out there—God, for instance, or the moral law—but we are not equipped to know them in the way we are equipped to know the things we can see and touch. Did this subvert "the reliability of knowledge"? Kant's work stands at the beginning of the era of modern science, during which the scope of knowledge was extended to an almost fantastic degree. Either his philosophy had nothing to do with that era and its achievements, in which case it is pointless to accuse him of anything, or else the theoretical questions raised by him and other eighteenth-century philosophers, such as David Hume, a man far more skeptical than Kant, had the practical effect of stimulating people to produce more knowledge rather than less.

And in fact the more doubt philosophers have cast on the notion of certainty, and the more cold water they have thrown on the belief that human beings are capable of a complete and disinterested—as opposed to a partial and interested—knowledge of anything, the more remarkable and useful the accomplishments of science and scholarship have become. The age of

NO

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Campbell's benighted postmodernism is also the age of the information revolution. This is surely because skepticism is the ally of inquiry. The greater our awareness of the fallibility of our understanding and the provisional nature of our concepts, the more techniques we devise for perfecting our data and the more pains we take to verify our conclusions. To suggest that the meaning of words is never stable, or that language is a tool we twist and turn to serve our purposes (ideas that Campbell identifies as "postmodernist"), is not to license deception. It is, on the contrary, to alert us to the possibility of deception, and, especially, self-deception. "Postmodernist" ideas, like any set of ideas, are not rules for living. They are devices for coping. The reason ideas become valuable is that they put us into a better relation with the world. That's the point of thinking them up.

Of course, it is possible to be too skeptical. Let's say that Campbell is correct on this point—that people have become distrustful of the truthfulness of what they hear and read, and tolerant of exaggeration and duplicity, to a degree that is unprecedented and pernicious. He doesn't provide a shred of evidence that this is so, but let's assume it is. Which is more likely to be the cause: a book by a French philosopher or the near-ubiquity of commercial advertising? Do people reflexively discount the truth content of the things they read because they have realized, after carefully studying "Of Grammatology," that meaning is untethered to a transcendental signified, or because they have become accustomed to a discrepancy between the products they buy and the promotional claims made for them—for example, the discrepancy between the jacket of a book and its contents?

Sullivan and Campbell, despite their preference for truth, honesty, and nice, straightforward referentiality, both acknowledge that these things are hard to come by, and that deception is everywhere, and is sometimes necessary. Sissela Bok made the same concession in her philosophical defense of honesty, "Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life," which was published in 1978, and is in its third edition—and which, for some reason, neither Sullivan nor

Campbell makes more than passing mention of. A great deal of ingenuity has been expended in the effort to come up with rules for locking in the meaning of words, for determining the truth or falsehood of a proposition or the intended meaning of a poem. But words are truants; they keep evading the rules, and this must be because semantic slipperiness is just a built-in feature of language. In evolutionary terms: if there were, long ago, two variants of language capacity in protohumans, one in which words had only a single, literal meaning (which is the way, for example, that some autistic people understand language) and another in which meaning was multiple and malleable, the second is the variant that got selected.

It's not difficult to see why. Humans use language to mislead (more charitably, to cover a lot of bases) for the same reason that digger wasps build false burrows: it improves the chances for survival. This can't be the end of the matter, though. That a trait is adaptive doesn't make it desirable. We don't mislead people simply because there is a biological imperative to do so. There are all kinds of social imperatives commanding us not to—just as there are kinds of social imperatives restricting the biological imperative to reproduce. Our Society deals with the inherent wriggleness of language by setting up a series of trip wires. When people stumble over one, the acceptable wriggle becomes an unacceptable lie. The interesting subject, therefore, isn't the possibility or impossibility of objective truthfulness. The interesting subject is the location of the trip wires, and the best way to explore it is to look at situations in which people have felt it very justified to tell a lie.

It is an additional peculiarity of Sullivan's and Campbell's books that they have almost nothing to say about two famous recent cases in which public figures have been accused of lying: Bill Clinton's deposition in the Paula Jones case (which Campbell has a paragraph on) and Clarence Thomas's testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee in response to Anita Hill's accusations. Clinton has not admitted perjuring himself in the Paula Jones deposition, although the judge in the case, Susan Webber Wright, concluded that

BRIEFLY NOTED

Merical Errors, by Alan Isler (Scribner; \$24). Father Edmond Music, the protagonist of Isler's new novel, is a French priest living in the English countryside with a number of secrets. For one thing, his allegiance to God is somewhat equivocal; for another, he's been carrying on for decades with Maude Moriarty, his flame-haired Irish housekeeper. Isler's portrait of hypocrisy also includes a farcical subplot in which an overzealous American clergyman is dispatched to investigate the disappearance of a rare Shakespeare manuscript. Breezily blasphemous and unerringly comic, the novel is rich with both emotional and literary rewards, but at its heart is a story that can be distilled to a single truism: men of the cloth are cut from the same cloth as other men.

Juniper Tree Burning, by Goldberry Long (Simon & Schuster; \$25). Reared in remote northern New Mexico by almost supernaturally negligent counterculture parents, Juniper Tree Burning Davis (who loathes her name) longs for an apple-pie life. She grows up and gets a man—she changes her name to Jennifer, goes to medical school, and marries the right man—but since she's been brought up to distrust the ones she loves, her impulse is to flee, and a reckless road trip ensues. Long's intricate flashback structure works: the scared, messy little girl is just under the surface of the swashbuckler Jennifer has become.

On the Beach, by David Wright and David Zoby (Scribner; \$26). After serving in the Union Army, Richard Ettridge, born a slave, returned to North Carolina's Outer Banks, where he had grown up learning to contend with the usually treacherous waters of that

stretch of the Atlantic Coast. He was recruited for the Life-Saving Service, which had been created by Congress, in 1871, to carry out shore-to-ship rescues. But Southern whites resented working alongside blacks, and the service fell back on Jim Crow: in 1880, Etheridge was appointed to head the country's only all-black life-saving station—Station 17, on Pea Island. He held the position until his death, in 1900. His career of hard work and heroism was officially recognized only belatedly; five years ago, the Coast Guard awarded him and his station a gold medal for rescuing the crew of the schooner E. S. Newman in the hurricane of 1896.

The Bush Dyslexicon, by Mark Crispin Miller (Norton; \$24.95). In W.'s world, political messages resignate, racial quotas vulcanize society, outstretched hands are shaken, and Bush himself is consistently underestimated. Bushspeak II has been a mother lode for the quickie-book industry, but Miller's is the first contribution to the genre that goes beyond the hearty (if cheap) laughs to be had by simply reprinting the man's words. Here the Bushisms provide the spine for a bracing, entertaining, and wrathful polemic; behind the malapropisms, Miller finds a political and media malaise that's more worrisome than just having a President to whom it's all Grecian.

Selected Poems, by Ciaran Carson (Wake Forest; \$12.95). Like the work of many of his Irish contemporaries, Carson's is a poetry of unlikely juxtapositions. In "Belfast Confetti," a bomb punctuates the poet's day: "Nuts, bolts, nails, car-keys. A fount of broken type. And the explosion / Itself—an asterisk on the map." Carson's rhymes are virtuosic—"lips" and "lapse"; "Antipodes" and "tippy-toes"—but such frills nurture rather than obscure his evocations. In an early poem, a woman throws soot on her flower beds and waits for spring, when "it would emerge softly / As the ink-bruise in the pansy's heart."



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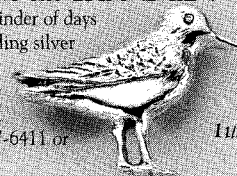
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he had used "deceptions and falsehoods." And there is no definitive finding that Thomas lied when he categorically denied saying the things that Hill testified he said. Clinton and Thomas are political figures, and our judgment of their behavior is naturally affected by our political preferences. But it is easy to understand, if they did lie, why they lied. In Clinton's case, he clearly believed that the Paula Jones lawsuit, and the entire Starr investigation, was a partisan frameup, with which he saw no reason to cooperate, any more than a President would feel obliged to sign legislation he found repugnant. (Well, with Clinton, of course, you never knew.) When he misled his interrogators, he was, in effect, exercising a veto. Clarence Thomas might—assuming Hill's story was true—have believed that his remarks to Hill were simply part of a crude and misguided attempt at flirtation, which no one could reasonably have expected to cause her distress. (Orlando Patterson suggested this internal scenario in an Op-Ed piece in the *Times* at the time of the hearings.) Thomas might further have believed (as he implied by his "high-tech lynching" remark) that he was the victim of a double standard—that actions which white liberals might have found unseemly but irrelevant in the case of a white nominee were being used to disqualify him because he is black and conservative.

What makes these cases different from ordinary situations in which we say to ourselves "They're just trying to mousetrap me; why should I help them out by telling the whole truth?" is that Clinton and Thomas were under oath, and we tend to feel that in those circumstances people just have to be honest and let the chips fall where they may. Putting that aspect aside, though, there are a couple of philosophical lessons in the Clinton and Thomas examples. The first is that there is a tendency, when we think about lying in the abstract, to imagine the liar as a person operating in a world of innocents. But in real life there is not the lie on one side and everything that is not a lie on the other. The dissembler is always part of a universe of dissemblers. This is not because everyone is dishonest; it is because all adult interactions take for granted a certain degree of insincerity and indirect-

tion. There is always a literal meaning, which no one takes completely seriously, and an implied meaning, which is what we respond to even when we pretend to be responding to the literal meaning. Language comes shrouded in an assumptive fog. People talk in code. When Clinton said, "It depends on what the definition of 'is' is," no one could possibly have misunderstood him. He was saying, "I had a sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky, but I contest your right to make me admit it." A great deal of literature (also a great deal of situation comedy) is built around imaginary cases in which one character misreads another character's code, or in which someone suffers by insisting on making explicit what the rest of the world knows is better left concealed by euphemism or denial. All of Henry James's late novels are stories of this second kind: they are about people who do not realize, until it is too late, that they are willing to exchange truth for happiness. They wish to clear away deception, without seeing that the people they wish to save—the dying heiress, the married woman in love with the younger man who is sure to abandon her—*want* to be deceived. They are, like the heroine of "The Golden Bowl," the victims of their own high-mindedness. There is a flaw in every bowl. Don't go looking for it if you want to enjoy the bowl.

For, as Clinton's and Thomas's stories suggest, there always are competing values. Honesty is a supreme good. So are happiness and fairness and friendship and freedom and a dozen other things. Most of the time, we are willing to settle for a little of each, and we try to avoid situations, like the situations James's characters find themselves in, where we are faced with renouncing one of them in order to secure another. At the end of the analytic day, though, all the goods we treat as supreme cannot be squared. We have to decide which one to use as trumps. When we say that someone has told a lie, we are therefore making a moral judgment, not (as Campbell imagines) an epistemological one. We are not saying that there is an inconsistency between the words the person uttered and the way things really are, since we can say that about almost any utterance. We are saying that, in this case, truthfulness was trumps. It generally is. ♦

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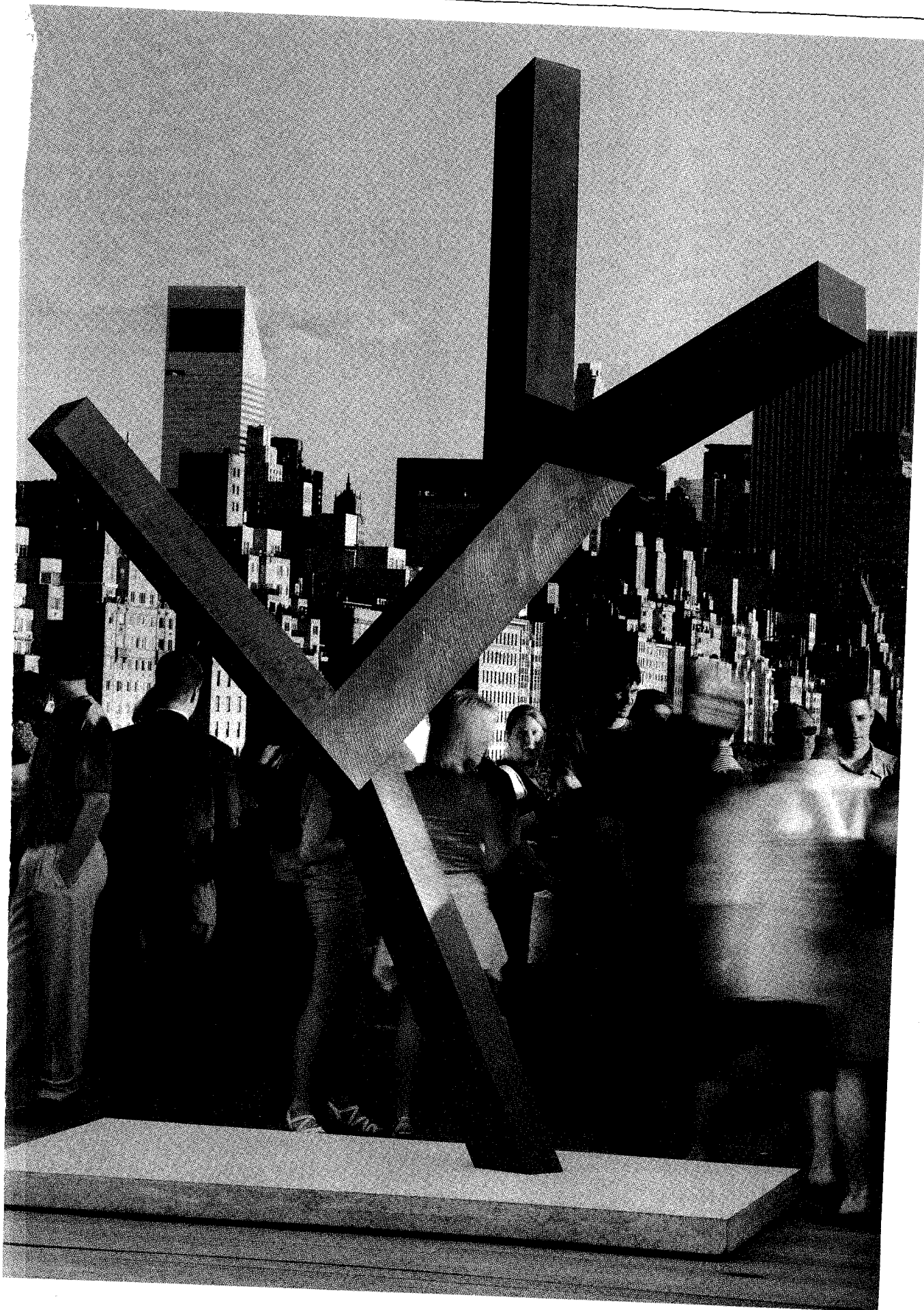
ART JOCKS

From the Metropolitan Museum of Art's roof garden, Central Park looks like the biggest and greenest swimming pool in town. Many visitors come for the view—the pool is fenced by the jagged architectural shrubbery of Central Park South and Central Park West—and on Friday evenings the singles scene is heavy. (There's also a reasonably full bar, open from 10 A.M. until the museum closes.) In this setting, sculpture, which Ad Reinhardt said was something you bumped into when stepping back to look at a painting is something that viewers bump into when trying to locate the Dakota.

This summer, five untitled sculptures by Joel Shapiro are handling such snubs with characteristic grace. They don't block the view, but they do complicate it, transforming the surrounding buildings into spectators of their cheerful athleticism. The central work is a Flying Wallendas-like cluster of limbs, which, at twenty-four feet tall, is one of Shapiro's biggest sculptures to date. The other pieces are humanoid stick figures of bronze or aluminum, caught in motion. One marches, one sprints, one topples, and one, which is painted a rocket-ship red, swings a leg back, like a speed skater doing an ecstatic final kick. (They will occupy the terrace until late fall.)

Over the past thirty years, Shapiro's sculptures have become more insidiously likable and less conceptually demanding. Critics have implied that this is a bad thing, a drift toward Henry Moore-is accessibility. But Moore's matriarchs invite you to caress them; Shapiro's athletes want you to get out of their way. They project a healthy impatience linking Degas's self-absorbed ballerina to John Woo's kung-fu fighters. Sure, they're simpler and less mobile than *are*. But they're also having a better tir-

—Alexi We



ON TELEVISION

FRIGHT NIGHTS

Prime time becomes slime time.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN



What a way to make a buck: grim reality finds a home on NBC.

NBC came late to the now crowded reality-TV party, and when it finally arrived, this summer, with "Fear Factor," an extreme-competition show, and "Spy TV," a twisted update of "Candid Camera," it did so not so much with a bang as with a splat, as if it had thrown two giant rotten tomatoes at the country's front door. Both shows, as it happens, have as an executive producer John de Mol, the Dutch impresario who created "Big Brother" (which is now back for a second season, on CBS). The name of his company, Endemol, is a combination of his name and his partner's, but I like to think that it's Dutch for "the end of the world as we know it." I don't have a favorite network in quite the same way that I had a favorite Beatle, but over the years I have had a sense, mostly unconsciously, that NBC had a kind of solidity

to it—that in the realms of news and entertainment its aim was basically true (even if its arrows were sometimes dull), and that there was a level below which it would not go. My feeling of being at one with NBC was rocked last year when it cancelled "Freaks and Geeks," a funny and moving show about teen-agers in 1980, and now, after watching several hours of "Fear Factor" and "Spy TV," I just don't know who NBC is anymore. It's like finding out that a guy in a Brooks Brothers suit is wearing underpants that say "Home of the Whopper." You can't sue a network for putting on bad shows—you think the courts are backed up *now*?—but, even though I am at the fraying end of the eighteen-to-forty-nine-year-old demographic that is so highly prized by advertisers, I feel entitled to cite NBC for alienation of affec-

tion. I'd like the relationship to continue—we've been together too long to call it quits—but from now on when I'm cuddling up with NBC I'll be wearing an implicit "I'm with Stupid" T-shirt.

"Damn! Damn! Damn! How the hell did I get myself into this?" Interestingly, these words were spoken not by a TV critic for a weekly magazine but by one of the contestants on "Fear Factor," who said them right before jumping off a hundred-and-ten-foot tower onto netting that was hanging two body lengths away from her. What distinguishes the stunts on this show from, well, from something that would be worth watching is that they are ugly to look at. The contestants, who have to do things like leap from one moving truck to another, climb from a speeding Jet Ski into a speeding helicopter, and allow themselves to be dragged a hundred yards by a team of running horses, are harnessed, goggled, and helmeted to the max, and you find yourself looking at all the cumbersome safety devices rather than admiring the contestants' prowess. In any case, prowess is really the right word for what's displayed on this hour-long show, which requires six people—three women and three men—to compete in three events for a fifty-thousand-dollar grand prize. The air is thick with all-American bluster and braggadocio: I'm here to win; my mother didn't raise a quitter. One woman model, said, "I come from Oregon, where I'm not afraid to get my hands dirty," a statement that, while impressive up to a point, leaves unanswered the question of whether there are any states in which she is afraid to get her hands dirty.

The gimmick of "Fear Factor" is that the stunts are dangerous—that there have been only a few cuts and bruises. But the stunts are designed to capitalize on primal human fears; the second element of every show is deliberately, and by anyone's definition, disgusting: in episodes that have aired so far, contestants have had to lie down for several minutes in containers filled with snakes (hundreds of them), mealworms (thousands of them), and snakes (two dozen) and have had to eat live insects. (I have the first "Survivor" to thank for raising the nausea bar to this level: not enough just to swallow worms and beetles anymore—you have to stick your tongue to prove that you chew

m.) One woman had trouble downing r worms—she kept spitting them ck into the Martini glass in which they d been served. It took her a minute d forty seconds to overcome her gag flex and get the job done, and by the d I felt sick myself. One does not have be a member of PETA to object to the .respectful way in which animals are sed by the show, and one does not have o be a member of Mensa to be put off y the lower-than-lowest-common-nominator approach of the host, Joe ogan. “How close were you to chuck- g?” he asked the contestants afterward. Rogan could be the person that Anne obinson, the host of NBC’s campy me show “Weakest Link,” is referring when she poses the question “Is there village that needs its idiot back?”)

Is this entertainment? No, it’s degration, and a reflection of the fear fac- r felt by television executives, as Jeff ucker, the president of NBC Enter- nment, acknowledged in a recent issue *Entertainment Weekly*. Noting that ople had high expectations of NBC cause of shows like “Frasier” (whose arms have always been lost on me) d “Law & Order,” Zucker said, in a her bald lack-of-mission statement, think that if we continue to try to duce multiple hours of programming hat level, we’ll get left behind.” One i only hope that sooner rather than r Zucker will find it in himself to k away from this proud declaration of ative defeat and eat his words. And I nt to see him chew them.

‘py TV,” a half-hour show, is on)twice a week, on Tuesdays and ursdays, where it is sandwiched like a e of bad meat between “Friends” and ill & Grace.” No money is given out his show; instead, the currency is huge ls of humiliation, dispensed freely to uspecting victims. In one episode, smirky host, Michael Ian Black o plays a bowling-alley employee NBC’s “Ed”), says, “If reality shows e proved one thing, it’s that ordinary ple will do just about anything for r fifteen minutes of fame. Well, here py TV,” ordinary people will do just it anything for their fifteen minutes me’ is our middle name.” That seems e pretty accurate: in one segment, a p of people who think they’re trying

out for a reality show called “Cannibals” all signed a waiver taking responsibility for their possible beheading, and three out of four ate pieces of what they were told was human flesh. (It was pork.) But, of course, the number of people who are willing to appear on these programs is small relative to the country’s total population; promoting the notion that “ordinary people will do just about anything” to appear on TV just happens to be a convenient way to rationalize putting on this kind of show.

The producers of “Spy TV” have gone to elaborate lengths to shred the social contract: a young man is taken for a phony test drive by a stunt driver, because his friends supposedly want to teach him a lesson about his own reckless driving; the ride is so terrifying that he begs over and over, at the top of his lungs, to be let out of the car. Another young man thinks he’s earning some pocket money by volunteering to fill out a police lineup but is then accused of a crime and brought into a room for questioning by “detectives.” I have to admit that I found a small amount of humor in his defense of himself. He said, “I’m twenty-three years old, and I sit at home, play video games, skateboard, watch TV—I don’t commit crimes.” As if mental idleness were the ultimate alibi, he added, “I’m an idiot. . . . I’m not a criminal, man.” But I should mention that he was practically crying by the end of the interrogation, that his words were spoken in desperation, and that this is a kind of humor I’d be happy to live without.

By now, a year after the debut of “Survivor,” viewers understand that reality-TV shows are just another kind of game show. Participants understand this, too—they’ve seen the first incarnations of “Survivor” and “Big Brother” and “Temptation Island” and know how to behave and what to expect. (This doesn’t mean that feelings won’t get hurt: the first contestant to be booted from the outback on the second “Survivor” was so crushed that she required a group hug when the show was over.) The fact that reality TV is now several removes from anything resembling reality doesn’t necessarily make it less interesting. But “Spy TV” is something else; it operates not by the rules of show biz but by the rule of terror. It’s several removes from anything resembling morality. ♦

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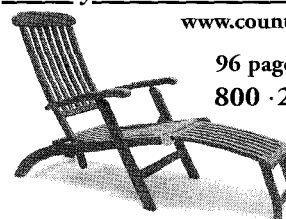
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THE CURRENT CINEMA

CLAWS

"Jurassic Park III."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The good news about "Jurassic Park III" is that, if the opening credits roll at eight o'clock, you'll be out of there and tearing apart some unsuspecting chicken by twenty to ten. The picture lasts an hour and a half, right on the button, and, for those who long ago signed on with the Campaign for Ninety-Minute Movies, there can be few higher recommendations. The first two installments of "Jurassic Park," both directed by Steven Spielberg, were baggy and bloated affairs, a chance for the artist to prove that he could still be a journeyman. They did nothing for the shape of his genius and everything for the tumult of his cash flow; now, for the third outing, Spielberg has stepped back to become executive producer and handed the direction to Joe Johnston. Such, at any rate, is the official story being bandied about by Universal; my own hunch is that, since "Jurassic Park III" is the leanest and most headlong of the series, with a clear streak of malevolence running down the tail, it was actually made by a raptor.

Our story begins in the skies above Isla Sorna, off the coast of Costa Rica, where a bid to diversify the country's natural produce has allowed the cultivation of twenty-foot, bone-swallowing dinosaurs instead of small, nonaggressive coffee beans. After a bad parasailing experience, a boy named Eric (Trevor Morgan) is last seen descending toward the interior. Some time later, a plane crash-lands in a local tree, bearing Dr. Alan Grant (Sam Neill); his assistant, Billy (Alessandro Nivola); a wuss named Kirby (William H. Macy); his wife and fellow-wuss, Amanda (Téa Leoni); and a bunch of other people whose identities, professions, and distinguishing

characteristics are left so ominous vague that I fear we must refer to them as packed lunch. They are all given warm prehistoric welcome by *Spiridonosaurus aegyptiacus*, a raging bully who is making his screen debut here; the lord on the face of *Tyrannosaurus rex*, the hero of the previous sagas, when he encounters this new and larger species of the block is, according to film historians, absolutely identical to that of Sylvester Stallone when he first got wind of Arnold Schwarzenegger. There is a furious, jolting sequence in which *Spiridonosaurus* finds a tubular chunk of the plane's fuselage and kicks it back at them with one determined claw, listening to the clatter of the folks inside. It's not much fun for them, but I could see his point: if you really want to smoke a human, it's much more satisfying to do it your own.

And so the menaces mount. Novelties include the pteranodon, which, not, as its name suggests, a cleanliness solution for dentures but a cousin of pterodactyl. (If I were a pterodactyl agent, I would badly want to know if my client didn't get the part. Was it too small, or too maladroit? Was he one of those wimpy vegetarian dinos, the semi-retired diplodocuses that see piddling about on the banks of the river?) The pteranodon makes a grand entrance, through a wall of mountain mist; he and his kin are mean and stupid and the prospect of falling prey to a flock of them should be familiar to anyone who has been mugged by a gang with an umbrella. Meanwhile, fans of the original "Jurassic Park" will be relieved to learn that their old favorite the raptor can still put on a decent show. The Neill character, who was the thought-

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e of that film, has spent the interesting years studying the habits and communication skills of the raptor. fierce, intelligent, and socially sophisticated," he calls them, and he even gets express himself in fluent raptor—a rarse and fluting tongue, and almost certainly easier to learn than Hungarian.

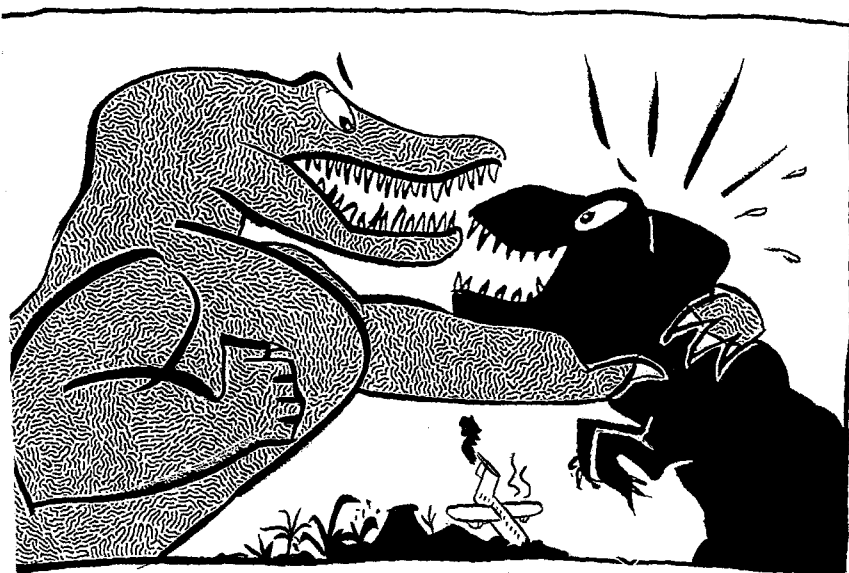
It was not long into "Jurassic Park III" that I found myself, against all expectation, leaning forward and laughing instead of lying there and fighting the urge to sleep. This was most peculiar; any movie title that contains the number "II" or "3," including the last section of the "Godfather" trilogy, tends to be a guarantee of bathos and exhausted ideas. But, then, the "Jurassic Park" franchise is

liver what is, if not an anti-Spielberg production, a definite blow to the ribs.

After all, why else would Eric, found alive and well in the jungle, say to Dr. Grant, "I read your books; I liked the first one better"? Translation: the first movie was fine, but the second one stank. Eric also claims to have read something by Dr. Malcolm, the Jeff Goldblum character in "Jurassic Park," and found it "preachy" and stuffed with chaos theory. These are all digs at Spielbergian themes, as is Grant's sneer at the "theme-park monsters" created by John Hammond (Richard Attenborough) in the early nineties. Hence the huge relief that you sense in the new film, and the source of its economy: no Attenborough mumbling on about the ethics

through the grinder, but also that of Alexander Payne and Jim Taylor, who, along with Peter Buchman, are responsible for the screenplay. Payne and Taylor were the begetters of "Election," one of the most pointed and unfazed American comedies of recent years; it was smart of someone to bring them on board for "Jurassic Park III," and, from the start, you catch an invigorating whiff of their cynicism. Everybody in this story is weak: Billy, the assistant, steals raptor eggs to make money, the Kirbys lie their way onto Isla Sorna in the first place, and even Grant—the incorruptible Dr. Grant, dean of dino scholarship, "the last of my breed"—gives an abashed and wretched smile as he agrees to visit the island and thus breaks an earlier pledge.

Of course, they are all eventually forced into varieties of heroism, but their resourcefulness feels funny and desperate, with hardly a glimmer of cool. When William H. Macy, whose aptitude for rugged action is limited by his inability to find the straps on a backpack, winds up an hour later on the tip of a metal gantry, screaming with exultant hatred at a beast beyond his reckoning, we don't think, Ridiculous. We think, Oh, yeah, he's like Chief Brody at the end of "Jaws," hanging on to the mast. The wuss is not transformed; he simply has his moment in the sun, or, in the case of the mournful Macy, in the wind and the rain. After the snickers at Spielberg, here is proper homage, and rightly so, although even Spielberg, in his boy-wonder days, might not have had the nerve to do what Johnston does with so apocalyptic a scene. Half drowned, hammered by Spinosaurus, who has obviously set his heart on eating American tonight, our guys make one last, anguished call on their satellite phone; crosscut to a placid home, back in the suburbs of the United States, where a small boy picks up. Asked to fetch his mom, he hesitates, because he is too busy watching Barney on the TV. A perfect gag, I think, although it also raises a pressing evolutionary question: if the wipe-out theory is correct, and if a single meteor did indeed bring the reign of the dinosaurs to an abrupt close, how, in the name of all that is sacred, did it miss the purple fatso? ♦



The new movie is, if not an anti-Spielberg production, a definite blow to the ribs.

erent, because it was already expected when it began; Spielberg had since made his true dinosaur movie, in 1975, and this was just less of the same. (A shark, in case you're wondering, is a hangover from the era of the dinosaur; why conjure false ones from extinction when you can fish for the real thing off Martha's Vineyard?) Joe Johnston is a slighter talent, yet he has his comic ruthlessness—I was a big of "The Rocketeer" and "October 31st"—and, as the designer of no less a creature than Yoda, in "The Empire Strikes Back," he knows that special effects exist to pump you up, not to blind or beat you down. Here, he grabs his chance, and I think it's very sporting of Spielberg to hang back and let him de-

of cloning, no Eden-like children enraptured by dinosaurs at dawn, no crummy cartoons explaining the basic science, no Godzilla ripoffs on the streets of San Diego. Just a bunch of dominant bipeds playing snack-attack with their inferiors, led by Dr. Grant. Your nerves start to go at the first glimpse of a raptor, so slight that it's barely there at all—a quicksilver line, flickering like an eel at the back of the scene, far beyond focal range. The plot is almost as pure as that of "Aliens": you hustle into a place that steams with uncontrollable danger, you try to do one good thing, and you get the hell out.

The clue to this surprising achievement is not just the presence of Johnston, with his benign desire to put us

THE BACK PAGE BY STEVE MARTIN

MY CELEBRITY CRIME PERKS



August, 1986: Busted while crossing from Mexico with three bags of pure heroin—got off scot-free!



December, 1991: Hit-and-ran, they found my sunglasses at crime scene—got lifetime free parking!



July, 1993: Caught red-handed setting insurance fire. Served no time—got series deal!



April, 1995: Embezzled cash from friends in phony-investment scam. Result: Best tables in restaurants!



December, 1999: Murdered spouse—no conviction, but prosecutor did time!



Hey! Wanna buy some baby-seal fur?

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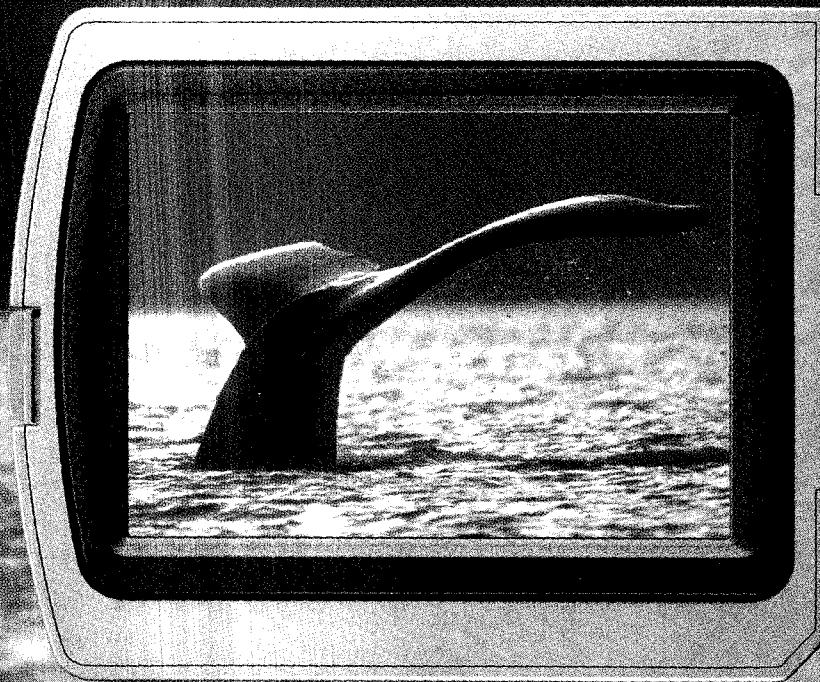
DREAM ON

The scar from the shark off Peru.

The scar from the reefs off Baja.

The scar from the fishing trawler off San Clemente.

The scar from the rocks off Alaska.



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